

**C O N F L I C T I N**

**M A R R I A G E**

*Books by Dr. Edmund Bergler:*

DIVORCE WON'T HELP

THE BASIC NEUROSIS

THE BATTLE OF THE CONSCIENCE

UNHAPPY MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE

FRIGIDITY IN WOMEN (in collaboration with  
E. Hitschmann)

PSYCHIC IMPOTENCE IN MEN

TALLEYRAND—NAPOLEON—STENDHAL—GRABBE

**CONFLICT**  
**IN**  
**MARRIAGE**  
**THE UNHAPPY UNDIVORCED**



**Edmund Bergler, M.D.**



---

**HARPER & BROTHERS**

*Publishers New York*

**CONFLICT IN MARRIAGE**

**COPYRIGHT, 1949, BY EDMUND BERGLER**

**PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**

**ALL RIGHTS IN THIS BOOK ARE RESERVED.**

**NO PART OF THE BOOK MAY BE REPRODUCED IN ANY  
MANNER WHATSOEVER WITHOUT WRITTEN PERMISSION**

**EXCEPT IN THE CASE OF BRIEF QUOTATIONS EMBODIED  
IN CRITICAL ARTICLES AND REVIEWS. FOR INFORMATION**

**ADDRESS HARPER & BROTHERS**

**FIRST EDITION**

**K-Y**

# CONTENTS

## FOREWORD

vii

### PART I

#### The Inexpressible Reproach

Chapter One	MALEVOLENCE IN TRIFLES	3
Chapter Two	THE FACTS BEHIND THE FACTS	27
Chapter Three	PRECAUTIONS AND REMEDIES	55

### PART II

#### Mental Cruelty

Chapter Four	MARITAL DUET: "YOU ARE CRUEL" —"YOU ARE SELFISH"	73
Chapter Five	"MY HUSBAND (WIFE) TORTURES ME BY . . ."	90
Chapter Six	PRECAUTIONS AND REMEDIES	139

### PART III

#### Marital Captivity

Chapter Seven	CATALOGUE OF TWELVE MARITAL DIFFICULTIES	151
Chapter Eight	THE FRIGHTENED LEAGUE AGAINST CHIVALRY AND WOMAN'S EQUALITY	174
Chapter Nine	PRECAUTIONS AND REMEDIES	182

## PART IV

## Marriage—A Workable Institution

Chapter Ten	THE ENEMIES OF MARRIAGE	193
Chapter Eleven	MARRIAGE IS FOR ADULT PEOPLE	204
Chapter Twelve	THE FUTURE OF MARRIAGE	214

## FOREWORD

HAVING devoted two books to the futility of divorce for neurotics,\* I have frequently been asked: "What about 'unhappy undivorced' couples? Why don't you say something about them and their troubles, instead of making it seem that you defend marriage on any basis?"

The present volume tries to fulfill that request. Good marriages exist in great numbers, but even in the best of marriages there is occasional and very real unhappiness and conflict. Marriage presupposes a series of mutual adjustments; but when the marriage partners are neurotic, these adjustments are not made. (Every human being harbors some neurotic tendencies; only when these are considerable in quantity do we speak of the person as "neurotic.")

I cannot emphasize too strongly that fundamentally marital unhappiness can be eliminated *only by analysis of the basic causes*, which have their roots in the unconscious. However, the majority of neurotics cannot afford to be psychiatrically treated (unfortunately, psychiatric therapy is a long-term procedure), nor do they wish to be, in the first place. Furthermore, there are not yet enough trained psychiatrists, nor funds available for extensive

\* *Divorce Won't Help*, Harper & Brothers, 1948; *Unhappy Marriage and Divorce*, International Universities Press, 1946.

psychiatric out-patient departments in hospitals. Consequently, the question of how to live in relative peace with one's untreated neurosis is of paramount importance. It is the lot of a large part of humanity.

What can a psychoanalytic psychiatrist say to these people, when they ask how to maintain some kind of psychic balance? Is there any knowledge, information, or understanding which could help them to keep their conscious lives from being at least too unbearable?

I believe that if it were possible to make people understand that there is no innocent victim in an unhappy marriage; that their anger, irritation, depression, unhappiness are only the results of a deep-seated neurotic conflict within themselves; that the mutual tortures they so lavishly dish out and put up with are impersonal—if it were possible to make them understand, in short, the real nature of their difficulties—the amount of conflict in their married lives could be at least diminished and their mental anguish lessened.

Dissatisfaction with marriage, on whatever grounds, cannot detract from the fact that there exists in every human being an emotional affinity to marriage, unconsciously established in early childhood. One's conscious objections have nothing at all to do with the real problems of unhappy marriage. There is no more convincing proof that marriage has an emotional basis than the undeniable fact that no substitute for it has ever been found. Though declared by many to be outdated, marriage is still very much alive.

EDMUND BERGLER

New York City, 1949



**PART I**

**THE**

**INEXPRESSIBLE**

**REPROACH**



## CHAPTER ONE

### Malevolence in Trifles

ALL happy families resemble one another; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own fashion," Tolstoy observes in *Anna Karenina*. This is undoubtedly true; nevertheless the fact remains that all marital unhappiness falls into one or more of three categories; inexpressible, expressible, and general.

Unhappiness of the inexpressible variety stems from irritation over trifles. Every human being has a stack of little habits—phrases, mannerisms, gestures, facial expressions—which he uses with unconscious and, it often seems, maddening regularity. One person says: "If you know what I mean . . ." ten times a minute; another holds his cocktail glass or cigarette in a particular way; a third is continually smoothing his hair or adjusting the handkerchief in his breast pocket; a fourth is partial to foreign phrases; a fifth holds her spoon like an adolescent girl though she is fifty. All this is in itself quite harmless, and only substantiates La Rochefoucauld's observation that everyone is slightly ridiculous: "If in some people the ridiculous part of their nature has not yet become apparent, the reason is that nobody has searched too thoroughly." These harmless habits, however, are often a source of constant irritation. And at this point

the trouble begins. An innocuous and faintly ridiculous habit or attitude is made a weapon in the battle of marriage.

When husbands or wives come into the open with their hidden thoughts, the psychoanalyst finds a superabundance of these chronically irritating trifles. They are rarely mentioned, however, because the exasperated partner is well aware that his anger is far out of proportion to the size or importance of the trifle. When, in rare cases, small irritating habits or attitudes are mentioned at all, the husband or wife is stunned by the amount of hatred aroused by the "harmless trifle."

In contrast to the inexpressible reproach, the second category of marital unhappiness, which comes under the heading of "mental cruelty," is loudly proclaimed. With eternal monotony, the complaint begins: "My husband (or wife) tortures me by . . ." Most people can fill in the rest of the sentence for themselves.

The third category is a catch-all of general dissatisfaction with marriage as an institution; it includes the frame of mind that regards marriage as an antiquated custom, a violation of privacy, a sexual trap, and the like, or as a form of enslavement in which freedom and self-expression are denied—"When I think what I gave up for you . . ."

Whatever its variety, most marital unhappiness stems from neurotic—hence unconscious—sources. Before we can explore the nature of these sources, however, some explanation of the workings and structure of the unconscious is necessary.

The story is told of a man on a ship in wartime who marveled at the panic of his fellow passengers after

sighting the periscope of an enemy U-boat. The periscope was so small; what was there to worry about? We laugh at the man's naiveté: he forgot that below the surface of the ocean, not visible to the naked eye, was a deadly weapon which could blow him to pieces.

Below the *psychic* surface, in the unconscious, similar dangers are hidden. A person who smiles condescendingly at those is no less naive than the passenger on the ship.

To continue the simile, let us compare the unconscious part of the personality with the submerged part of the submarine. Imagine that in this underwater craft a peculiar situation exists: there is not one captain, but four. However, the command decisions on this U-boat are made by only *three* of the captains. Furthermore, their decisions are made behind closed doors. They are covenants not openly arrived at. To make matters worse, these three captains quarrel. Two of them shout contradictory commands at the third, who has but one aim: to reconcile the conflicting orders he receives and keep peace between his two tormenting colleagues. After long and heated arguments, many threats, and even outright conflicts, he devises a compromise acceptable to the other two. That compromise he now communicates to the fourth captain, who carries it out. This fourth captain is the only captain known and visible to the crew. He is, moreover, an extremely conceited fellow; he pretends, and even believes, that the decisions of the three invisible captains are of his making. Proudly, and full of naive conceit, he constantly asserts, "I decided . . ."

If you now apply this simile to the personality, you will have a faint idea of what is really going on. What

you are aware of, like the crew of the submarine, is only the fourth captain, your conscious ego—what you call your “I”—the consciously knowing, thinking, feeling part of your personality. Your conscious ego serves as the executive organ of the forces of the unconscious and is their contact man with the external world. Its acts, apparent decisions, reactions are completely controlled and motivated by them.

The three invisible captains of our simile represent the *unconscious*, the part of your mind that you are not even aware of, since it is not available to conscious introspection. Nevertheless, it is the most important part of you. Though unmeasurable, invisible, impalpable, it exists as a silent force, a set of deep-lying, complex functions whose workings determine the whole course of your life. It comprises the *id*, the *unconscious ego*, and the *superego*. The *id* is the seat of your uncivilized impulses; it harbors your ancient, repressed wishes and most primitive emotions and desires. It is the “I want” in man; but it cannot get anything for itself. To satisfy the demands of the *id* is the job of the *unconscious ego*. However, it is not an easy job, for the *ego* is restricted and inhibited in its choice of solutions by the counter demands of the *superego* or inner conscience. The *superego*—a cruel, pleasure-denying, anti-hedonistic force—is not identical with the conventional moral code that often goes by the name of conscious conscience. The *super ego* misuses external prohibitions, acts as an inner judge, criticizing and condemning the decisions made by the *ego*.

If the motto of the *id* is “I want,” that of the *super-ego* may be said to be “No! You must not.” It is the

difficult function of the unconscious ego—like that of the hapless third captain—to act as intermediary between the id and superego and to try to reconcile their conflicting demands. However, though weak and pretty much at their mercy, the ego occupies a position of strategic importance, in that it is also a contact man with the conscious part of the personality—the fourth captain—and the outside world. Nevertheless it is weak; and in a desperate effort to appease both the id and superego, it tries to work out a satisfactory compromise of their conflicting orders.

In the more or less normal personality, the ego is strong enough to devise a compromise which satisfies the clamorous demands of the id in a way acceptable to the superego. In the neurotic personality, however, the ego, weakened in various ways during its infantile and childhood development, is unable to strike a satisfactory balance and consequently is forced to adopt devious and oblique methods in its attempt to carry out the primitive wishes of the id. The unsatisfactory nature of this inner compromise manifests itself outwardly as a neurotic symptom or personality disorder.

Quite simply then, neurosis is a disorder or malfunctioning of the unconscious. It means that these inner forces have been misbehaving.

Again, perhaps oversimply, neurosis is the child in you taking control. Every human being in infancy and childhood passes through definite phases of development, each characterized by certain universal conflicts. Normally these phases are outgrown, and the conflicts, satisfactorily resolved, are left behind. The neurotic, however, does not outgrow them. One or another of these

way stations becomes a permanent station, and the attendant conflicts become fixed in a specific pattern of behavior which the neurotic repeats over and over again throughout his life. Endlessly he reenacts his infantile conflict, one or another person whom he unconsciously identifies with someone connected with the original and still unsettled conflict. In short, the neurotic person is an "unconscious repeating machine"—repeating the specific pattern characteristic of his specific neurosis.

Instead of going further into theory, let us investigate a clinical case, the mechanisms of which are typical of all of my later examples.

A young woman pianist once consulted me because her husband had "absolutely forbidden" her further appearance on the concert platform, and that "fatally unreasonable" attitude had made her life "unbearable." She loved her husband and she loved her music; but she could not have both nor could she choose between them. She said that her husband's demand that she give up her music and become simply a housewife was of recent origin. When I pressed her on that score, however, she admitted that he had tried to persuade her, even before their marriage, that she should lead a less exciting life. "I did not take him seriously, of course," the woman said. "Now, however, he has changed into a raving maniac, shouting and threatening . . ."

In analysis, the patient described her mother as a "conceited snob" with "fancy ideas of social values," her father as a "rather distant" person, but a moneymaker. She remembered the home atmosphere as "cold and unloving"; her only solace was the piano, for which she early showed a remarkable talent. When I asked whether her



parents approved or disapproved of her career, she said that at first her mother had disapproved; but eventually in her "snobbishness" had been pleased with her daughter's success and hence had encouraged her. After the girl passed the period of puberty, her mother became deeply concerned over her concerts, and this had led to an "excellent relationship" between them. The patient had "in retrospect" as she called it, a "sentimental and warm-hearted" feeling for her mother. With deep emotion she constantly alluded to the scene at her mother's deathbed, when, even though dying, her mother had showed concern over her daughter's musical progress.

Now we know that neurotics are incapable of creating anything new as adults and that they *unconsciously misuse reality, as if it were a movie screen, to reel off repressed infantile conflicts*. Hence the suspicion arose that the patient was not so much an innocent victim of her husband's *unreasonable* behavior as she consciously assumed. One can always deduce the infantile conflict from later repetitions. The question accordingly presented itself: what was she repeating, and to whom did the original conflict pertain?

The question cannot be answered without at least a cursory description of the psychic situation of the infant.

The child's life starts, both inside and outside the womb, with a relation to the mother. In the beginning of its *extra-uterine existence*, the child is completely dependent on a woman's care—mother or nurse. Mother is the constant provider; without her loving and sacrificial care the child would die of hunger and exposure. That is an obvious fact—unfortunately known only to the adult, who sees the real situation. From the infant's

point of view the story is quite different: to himself he seems self-sufficient.

Spoiled by the long sheltered existence in the womb, after birth he continues to live for some time in a fantasy of magic omnipotence, although actually, of course, he is confronted with radically changed conditions. Nevertheless his parents try intuitively to imitate and re-establish the conditions of prenatal bliss. Every provision is made to let the child sleep most of the time in a darkened room; he is fed at regular intervals; warmth and quiet are provided and an attempt is made to satisfy, even to anticipate, his every want. From these circumstances, the child gets a peculiar misconception of reality, of his own power and self-sufficiency, and quite naturally acquires a good-sized megalomania. Actually—objectively—of course, the facts are quite otherwise: the baby is completely dependent, and inevitably its fantasy of omnipotence is gradually shattered. The child finds out that reality and fantasy do not coincide, and that he is not the omnipotent sorcerer he imagines himself to be. He experiences a protracted series of disappointments and frustrations. For example, he wakes up and is hungry. He gives a magic signal: he cries. Mother is at hand with breast or bottle—but even in the best regulated nurseries there are delays. The few moments of waiting for nourishment are calorically without importance. But to a child still living in a fantasy of omnipotence, something terrible has happened. The delay is a rude shock, and forces upon him the realization that his power is not complete.

Imagine a thousand such little incidents, pertaining to all types of disappointments, including the tragedy

of weaning, and you have the beginning of the collapse of the most grandiose fantasy ever built: the fantasy of infantile omnipotence.

The transition to an acceptance of reality is not simple nor achieved at once. No one accepts painful facts without putting up some kind of fight. Every refusal, every disappointment is met with fury. That fury uses a biologically endowed drive: aggression. But this aggression labors under a severe handicap, for the child's muscular apparatus is completely inadequate to translate it into deeds.

As the child grows older, another complication is entered on the balance sheet of his hostile impulses. Grudgingly he is forced to acknowledge his dependence on his mother and her provident kindness, which means that any aggression toward her produces a feeling of guilt. Hence his expressions of aggression are inhibited by this factor as well as by his early muscular helplessness.

The child solves this quandary by a process called projection. He shifts his own hostile impulses onto the parent. This peculiar shift accounts for a new set of tragic misconceptions: to the mother or father are now attributed all the hostile feelings the child himself harbors. He is not angry with mother; mother is angry with him; she is "mean" and "cruel" and wants to hurt him.\*

True enough, these misconceptions are consciously corrected later—but in some neurotics they remain deeply enshrined in the unconscious, producing fantastic fears and creating the image of "bad" parents, though

\* The cruelties attributed to the mother comprise a "septet of baby fears"; the mother is accused of wanting to "starve, poison, devour, choke, chop to pieces, drain, castrate." For details see the author's *The Book of Fears*, Washington Institute of Medicine, 1949.

in reality the parents may have been good and kind.

Even our pianist, a rather friendly person, as a child accused her mother of cruelty, of obstructing her career out of sheer snobbishness. Later she devaluated her mother's acceptance of her career with the argument that her mother's snobbishness had been flattered by the daughter's success.

As the child's expressions of aggression—naughtiness, stubbornness, outright rebellion, etc.—become more effective with age, they are curbed by the parents with what I call the "triad of retribution"—punishment, moral reproach, and guilt. The parent employs not only educational penalties but moral suasion as well: "How can you do this to your mother!" The child learns that aggression toward his parents, whether in thought or deed, is not only unrewarding, but morally wrong. As a result, he cannot give expression to it without experiencing a painful sense of inner guilt. In normal children the process stops there. Discovering that hostility toward parents—both persons with a halo—does not pay, he diverts his aggression toward some more suitable, less "holy" object, or sublimates it in games, sport, work, or the like.

The neurotic child, however, persists in his original aggression against all odds and despite the accompanying feeling of guilt. Maintained for any length of time, the situation becomes untenable, since every human being lives on the basis of the inner pleasure principle: that is, he seeks to avoid pain and to obtain pleasure.

The normal way out having been passed up, it would seem that the child is confronted with a more difficult problem than were the scientists at Oak Ridge. The lat-

ter did finally create the atom bomb; but without the aid of technical knowledge, a specific type of child at the ages of one to two, solves an even greater problem: how to extract pleasure from displeasure, humiliation, and punishment.

One cannot even guess at the solution—the ingenuity of the child is amazing. He creates his own internal atomic bomb—*psychic masochism*. That term means unconscious pleasure derived from displeasure. In other words, to get some pleasure out of the uncomfortable amalgam of aggression and guilt, the child makes lack of pleasure a pleasure. By “liking” displeasure, pain, the child nullifies punishment. The minute punishment no longer deters but unconsciously allures, the child’s problem is solved. This internal solution, however, entails failure and defeat in real life.

The child who takes this passive way out of his infantile conflict has secondarily to ward off the reproaches of his superego. This inner conscience disapproves of the masochistic solution, first, because it is opposed to any kind of pleasure; second, because the child’s whole education pushes him into activity and success, which are contrary to masochistic aims. Consequently, to appease the superego, the child builds up an alibi. The unchanging pattern of this alibi I have named the “*mechanism of orality*,” because it originates during the oral period of the child’s psychic development, when his mouth is his main contact with reality. The pattern is this:

Act 1. The child unconsciously provokes or misuses a situation in which somebody refuses his wishes or otherwise treats him unjustly.

Act 2. Not conscious that he himself engineered his misfortune, he sees only the "meanness" of the one who disappointed him, and fights back in righteous indignation—seemingly in self-defense.

Act 3. Unconsciously enjoying his defeat, the child then pities himself extensively—"This could happen only to poor little me."

In this pattern conscious and unconscious elements are interwoven. The initial provocation (Act 1) and the masochistic enjoyment of defeat (Act 3) are wholly unconscious. Conscious are the aggression and the righteous indignation of Act 2 as well as the self-pity of Act 3. It thus appears that the aggression is not genuine; it is a spurious or pseudo-aggression, a great show put on to deceive the superego and to camouflage the child's real unconscious aim—that is, his masochistic wish to be denied, rejected, humiliated, mistreated.

All this pertains to the pre-oedipal period—the period of the dual mother-child relationship. At this time (from the beginning of life to one-and-a-half years) it is the mother who is all-powerful in the nursery, the mother upon whom he projects his hostile impulses. During these eighteen months the father plays a role of practically no importance. Later, however, the father is more in evidence, is even a powerful competitor for the mother's attention, which otherwise is given to the child. In time the child's conflict with his mother becomes unbearable. Despite the aggression and fear he heaps upon her, she appears also as giver and dispenser. These contradictory feelings battle one another and are—as is every conflict—painful.

Put these facts together—the necessity of digesting

the father's presence and the necessity of solving a conflict of contradictory feelings (ambivalence toward the mother)—and you have the beginnings of the much-discussed and even more widely misunderstood Oedipus complex.

The child sees an escape from his unhappy situation in the triangular child-mother-father relationship, technically called the oedipal phase (one-and-a-half to five years). Here the boy shifts his aggression and fears from his mother onto his father, who, in this later projection, becomes endowed with all the cruel misconceptions originally pertaining to the mother. Mother, demoted and weakened by this shift of power, becomes the incarnation of the child's own passivity.\* If the baby in relation to mother was passive, fearful, overwhelmed, it now seems to the boy, identifying with his father's power and strength, that the tables are completely turned. The girl splits off her ambivalent pre-oedipal relation to the mother the other way around: love is shifted to father; hatred remains with mother.

(In all this the element of irony is not absent. What seemed to enraged Victorians a morally objectionable tendency, turns out to be—in my opinion—a device installed to enable one to escape the deepest of all dangers: passivity and fear relating originally to the mother.)

Both the pre-oedipal and the oedipal phases are normally transitory periods, later given up. The oedipal sexual wishes experienced by every child for the parent of the opposite sex are recognized as impossible; de-sexualized and changed into normal filial tenderness; the hos-

\* I should add that this deduction is simply my own opinion.

tile feelings for the parent of the same sex are abandoned and changed into normal filial camaraderie.

If these early wishes and fantasies are not given up, neurosis results. In pre-oedipally regressed cases—that is, cases in which the neurosis originated in the pre-oedipal phase of development—the enshrined image of the cruel mother is later projected upon every woman to whom there is an emotional attachment. In oedipally regressed neurotics, the child-mother-father triangle is endlessly repeated, with attendant feelings of guilt, leading to a variety of neurotic complications.

The period of latency starts at the end of the fifth year and continues more or less until puberty. At that point a biological and endocrinological activity push revives the old fantasies and conflicts. It is then that the final destiny of the child is decided: normalcy, neurosis, psychopathy, criminosis, psychosis. Puberty is comparable to the highest court: experience proves that the high court only too often confirms the decisions of the lower courts—i.e., infancy and childhood. The chances are that if you lost in childhood, you will lose out in puberty. If, for example, the man unconsciously still sees in every woman the forbidden mother of his oedipal boyhood, the inner conscience objects and psychic impotence results. The girl pays for the identification of husband with father with frigidity and feelings of guilt.

Let us now apply these facts to our pianist. The probability arose that she, too, was a psychic masochist, an "injustice collector," an attitude originally acquired in relation to the first upbringer—mother.

One could object that the cold, snobbish mother and the detached father gave the child excellent hitching



posts for her feeling of being rejected and deprived. That is true, but it tells only half of the story. If there were only the unfavorable emotional environment of childhood to cope with, the pianist's life would have taken a different turn: she would have corrected the emotional coldness of her nursery by marrying a kind, loving, devoted, affectionate husband. What our pianist did, however, was not to correct her real or fancied disappointments—a road leading to normalcy—but rather to perpetuate the “depriving” reality. The husband she had chosen was nagging and demanding, in short a tyrant—as her mother was.

The patient reacted violently to these deductions. How was she to know that her husband was to develop into “such a snob.” I called her attention to the fact that she had used the word “snob” in describing her mother. Was there here a hint that she was making an unconscious identification?

Once more, however, the patient objected: her recollections of her mother always concentrated on her behavior in the last ten years of her life. It was then that she wanted a career for her daughter. Had I forgotten that even at her deathbed her mother had worried over her concerts?

I had not forgotten that scene, I assured the patient. What was the situation in childhood? Was her mother always in favor of her musical ambitions?

At once, the patient remembered something “completely forgotten.” Her mother had made a “big scene” when the girl was offered a concert as a child prodigy at the age of eight. Her mother had refused the offer indignantly, considering that her daughter's appearance in

public lowered the family standard. At that time the child felt deeply hurt—mother was depriving her.

That recollection opened the Pandora's box of injustices meted out by her mother—mostly in the child's fantasy. It is characteristic of the early onset of neurosis in childhood that that mother's later change of attitude toward her daughter's career no longer influenced the already unconsciously established pattern: "Mother is unjust." That pattern was so deeply established and repetitive that even the sex of the person who disappointed her was unconsciously disregarded: her husband took over her mother's role!

The patient had chosen her nagging and disagreeable husband, *not despite but because* of those characteristics: unconsciously, she saw in him a good duplicate of the person whom as a child she had imagined her mother to be. With the sureness typical of neurotics, she selected and set the stage for the unconscious repetition!

Compare these facts with the idea harbored by so many that psychoanalysis is obsessed with sex, and that the Oedipus complex is the heart of it. The case of the pianist seems not to fit this simplified picture. She did not unconsciously repeat on the marital scene a "libidinous" conflict with her father, but a masochistic conflict originally pertaining to the mother in infancy, or more precisely to the *distorted fantasy* the child created of the real mother. To use the scientific terminology, a pre-oedipal and not an oedipal conflict was unconsciously acted out. The center of her conflict was not sexual at all: it centered around undigested aggression. Libido and aggression are—as Freud stressed in the last third of his long scientific life—equal partners in the psychic house-

hold. And the plague of humanity, its real psychic cancer—psychic masochism—is at bottom an undigested aggressive conflict, only secondarily “libidinized.”

The majority of neurotics are (once more, in my opinion) pre-oedipally regressed. They have a rendezvous with undigested orality and suffer, as a result, from psychic masochism. Nobody denies, of course, that more superficial regressions to the oedipal level do exist clinically; people suffering from such oedipal conflicts we call hysterical neurotics. I believe, however, that all more superficial neuroses represent simple rescue attempts from the oral danger.

The chronic tendency of neurotics to repeat over and over the specific pattern of an infantile conflict is technically called transference. It is the only emotional attachment neurotics are capable of.\* Superficially and subjectively, it seems to be “love.” The analytic microscope, however, reveals a repetition of an undigested bygone conflict. I have compared this repetitive tendency with the attitude of a man who possesses but one victrola record which he carries with him everywhere, playing it endlessly wherever he finds a victrola.

That transference addiction makes for monotony: neurotics always get themselves into the same mess. Transference occurs in psychiatric treatment, too. That unconscious shifting of infantile conflicts onto the innocent and by-chance physician is one of the more powerful weapons of psychoanalysis. Emotional repetition is confronted with reality, infantile recollections are elicited, unconscious conflicts revived, and the old pattern is solved through an emotional experience (as contrasted

\* See *Divorce Won't Help*, Chapter V, “Neurotics Can't Love.”

to ineffective intellectual ones). Our pianist, for example, projected upon me a series of "terrible injustices," pertaining in inner reality to her mother.

What does the neurotic *consciously* know about his inner conflicts? Exactly nothing, and that is what makes him so helpless. Our pianist honestly considered herself the victim of her husband's "unreasonable attitude." That she had chosen him for the precise purpose of *reliving and enjoying* an infantile conflict was unknown to her. Confronted in analysis with these facts, she showed resistance. Resistance is the manifestation of the static element in the unconscious. The formula is: "Don't disturb my inner pleasure." It is exactly that "inner pleasure" which has to be changed in treatment. Though everyone has to find his specific brand of "pleasure," the trouble is that *the unconscious pleasures of the neurotic must be paid for with conscious unhappiness*. This unhappiness is the bribe offered to the inner conscience, or superego.

The whole structure of neurosis is based on a series of inner compromises. The fantastic barter works something like this:

The repressed wishes and desires of the id are vetoed by the stern, pleasure-denying superego. However, the neurotic's superego is corrupt, and can be bought off with the punitive currency of the nursery—self-inflicted punishment, guilt, and unhappiness. Through the mediation of the unconscious ego, which acts as middle man, the superego finally agrees to the wish on the condition that it be enjoyed in fantasy only, and even for that exacts a price of self-torture and conscious unhappiness.

Thus, in this corrupt deal, remnants of infantile re-

pressed wishes—outwardly manifested in neurotic symptoms or unconscious defense mechanisms, are rescued at the price of suffering. The superego is appeased—though not hoodwinked. To illustrate, let us take again the case of the pianist. What did she really want? Analysis revealed that unconsciously she wanted to be hurt, deprived. That unconscious wish was counteracted by a severe veto from the superego. The compromise worked out by the unconscious go-between (the unconscious ego) was: on the condition of conscious suffering, you may enjoy your wish to be treated unjustly. Consciously the pianist was very unhappy; but the fact that she clung to her childhood disappointment and repeated it unconsciously on the marital stage showed that it had a great magnetic power.

Psychoanalytic psychiatry, by means of a specific technique, changes the balance of inner power by throwing out of office the corrupt superego and substituting one which is incorruptible. The moment the inner conscience means "No" when it "says" "No," the neurotic deal is impossible. To stabilize the new balance further, the ego becomes stronger and thus it is no longer so helpless against the wishes of the id. The result is relative normalcy.

The decisive part of the personality is the superego.\* Success or failure, happiness or depression, love or loneliness, are all dependent on that inner conscience. All the distortions and contortions of the neurotic personality are produced for its benefit. It is responsible also for the fact that under no earthly conditions are we directly con-

\* See the author's book *The Battle of the Conscience*, Washington Institute of Medicine, 1948.

fronted with "unconscious wishes." What we see—on the psychic surface—are but modified defense mechanisms—the outward signs of the inner compromise. Volcanic eruption of "repressed drives" never occurs.

Fortified with the preceding admittedly very sketchy outline of the psychic development of the child, let us investigate one of the tragic conflicts of every marriage: "malevolence in trifles."

The approach of the average adult toward details is replete with contradictions. He admires people who, like the great detectives and diagnosticians, are capable of drawing far-reaching conclusions from little details. At the same time he satirizes the detail-hunter of the Sherlock Holmes variety and believes such nonsense possible only in fiction. To complicate matters, he is irritated with people who are incapable of seeing a situation in its complex entirety and considers the person who concentrates on a few unimportant details to be below his own level of intelligence. The typical man complains that the typical woman does exactly this, and that it "drives him crazy." The typical woman returns the compliment with interest. Every marriage turns out to be, among other things, a race for the solution of a question which is posed by both participants at different times: "Which of us is the more childish?"

The adult never stops to clarify his attitude toward details. Hence, one finds in the same person admiration, rejection, anger, complaint—all centered around the use or misuse of details.

Could one pin down an intelligent adult and force him to clarify his attitude, he would, after thinking it over,

very likely say something like this: It is important to be able to see a situation as a whole, overlooking hundreds of details and concentrating on essentials and general trends. Most people do exactly the opposite: they observe only unimportant details and thus arrive at erroneous conclusions. On the other hand, details may be indicative of the situation as a whole: the problem is obviously to *distinguish between unimportant trimmings and significant details.*

A comparison of two situations will clarify the distinction. A patient of mine was laughed at by her rather sophisticated friends when, asked for her impressions after attending a performance of *Hamlet*, she observed: "The actor who played Hamlet's part must have been left-handed: he was holding the skull in his left hand during the churchyard scene."

She then went on to point out that in a well-known thriller the whole problem of who committed the murder hinged on the discovery that because of the type of wound inflicted the guilty person must be left-handed. The lawyer asked to borrow the watch of the witness, then threw it back to him. Instinctively, the guilty suspect caught the expensive watch with his left hand. My patient complained that the same people who had laughed at her comment on the play, admired the cleverness of the mystery's denouement. The difference is clear-cut: in the first case, her friends expected a psychological analysis of Hamlet's indecision and got instead a rather pointless observation of an irrelevant detail. In the murder story, the detail of left-handedness was a decisive clue.

In general, it can be stated that, more often than not,

for reasons unknown to them, intelligent people mistrust details. The unconscious motivation behind that attitude will be clarified later.

The intelligent man whom we used as guinea pig earlier is thrown into a turmoil of doubt by the next problem we submit to him. The question is: "Isn't it true that you have observed in your wife a number of irritating mannerisms, word-usages, attitudes, gestures, which anger you out of proportion to their importance? Isn't it also true that you have tried to convince yourself time and again that your irritation is as senseless as it is unjustified, and still all your reasoning has not helped you?" Our test-object searches among his memories and admits with some hesitation the correctness of the observation. Asked for an explanation, he first stammers and then suggests that seemingly everybody inwardly harbors a good-sized anger, even against people they love, and that that anger is attached to irritating trifles.

"But why exactly to this specific trifle?" we inquire.

To that we do not get an answer. Our guinea pig turns the tables and asks us for an explanation.

Let us give a few martyred husbands and wives the floor.

MR. A.: "Are you familiar with Lord Chatham's statement: 'As to politeness, I would venture to call it benevolence in trifles.' Well, I'm not benevolent in trifles and cannot be even moderately polite when my wife pulls one of her tricks. She constantly uses the phrase 'If you know what I mean,' and follows it with some banality. Every time she says it, something boils over inside of me. The silly phrase reminds me of her immaturity and inflated



nothingness. I've warned her, but still she persists in irritating me."

Mrs. A. (the wife): "You ask me what makes my marital life intolerable? My husband's constant criticism of my speech. I am an adult—what right has he to decide what expressions I should use or not use?"

Mr. B.: "I always reproach myself when I get irritated by some of my wife's little habits, but I can't help it. One thing that irritates me is her way of half-opening her mouth when she's listening to a person tell a story. That half-open mouth, head slightly deflected to the left—to me these are storm-signals; she can't wait to tell her own story. Why do women talk so much?"

Mr. C.: "I love my wife, but I get furious when she tries to educate me. She corrects my manners and acts like a governess. It's not what she says that gets me, it's her tone of voice. How can one love a woman and hate her in one specific detail?"

Mrs. D.: "I'm chronically irritated with my husband, but if you ask me why, I am ashamed to mention such trifles. Inwardly, we seem to react much more intensely to little things; it is only afterwards that our sense of justice objects to our magnifying such silly details. For instance, a certain gesture my husband makes of smoothing his hair is a red flag to me, and he does it constantly."

Mrs. E.: "What irritates me most in my husband? I have to admit that it is a petty detail. It is a look of pompous superiority he assumes when he's writing checks. He looks as if he were signing a state document of the highest importance. He is quite unaware of that expression, but it just makes me furious."

Mrs. F.: "Before I give you my complaints about my

## CONFLICT IN MARRIAGE

husband, I must first enumerate what is good about him. He is reliable, a good provider, loving toward the children, considerate in relation to me. Nevertheless he has the ability to bring out the worst in me. I can't put my finger on anything important and if I try to substantiate my irritation, only trifles remain. I believe that emotionally we live a silly existence and react to minor factors more intensely than we do to essentials. What would you say if I confess that the center of my marital irritation is a—handkerchief? Yes, a handkerchief. The infinite care and air of self-sufficiency with which my husband puts the damn thing in the breast-pocket of his suit every morning, makes me see red. I've tried different tricks: I've put the stupid rag in his pocket myself in the evening, I've told him not to do it in my presence; nothing helps. I just imagine him doing it every morning, and it spoils my appetite for breakfast. Now tell me that I'm crazy."

The statements of these people have three factors in common:

The irritating trifle is of the smallest caliber. The irritated person's own sense of fairness objects to his magnification of the trifle. The reason for his irritation is unknown to the irritated victim.

The persistence of irritation in the irritated person, coupled with the chronic repetitiveness of the irritating habit in the marriage partner, suggests that both phenomena have an unconscious basis.

Our investigation of marital "malevolence in trifles" so far has yielded a phenomenological description and a psychological question mark. But the problem cannot be explained from the point of view of the psychology of consciousness.

## CHAPTER TWO

### The Facts Behind the Facts

EVERY unconsciously based reaction has both an unconscious substructure and a conscious superstructure. Most people confuse the superstructure, manifested in rationalizations, with the underlying unconscious reason for their reactions. Indeed, they are infuriated when the subterranean basis is even hinted at.

Science cannot afford the luxury of this convenient and rewarding naïveté, although every scientist is conscious of Don Marquis' warning: "If you make people think they're thinking, they will love you. If you really make them think, they'll hate you."

Before going into details, a correction of an unavoidable misunderstanding is in order. To save space, only excerpts are presented from complicated and protracted analyses. Some of these excerpts sound as if only the dramatic highpoints were recorded, and that they were arrived at in an easy way. Nothing of that kind happens in actual psychoanalysis. The long and tiring drudgery of finding and working through the psychic material, has simply been omitted.

Another objection has to be refuted, too. People who are ignorant of unconscious mechanisms in neurosis are startled when told that the reactions of adults have a connection with *infantile* fantasies, wishes, and guilt.

They argue that only "reality factors" are involved in marriage. Unfortunately, this is not the case. The reality of marriage is misused—unconsciously misused—to reel off an infantile repressed pattern. That is the decisive mechanism in neurosis.

Last but not least, the objection could be raised that all these ladies and gentlemen were, more or less neurotic; hence their troubles do not permit one to draw any conclusions regarding normal people. This is fallacious. The difference between neurosis and so-called normalcy is a quantitative one only. The solutions of inner conflicts are different: the conflicts per se identical. In my opinion a "normal" person is one who is not too neurotic. Every human being harbors neurotic conflicts.

All the people whose complaints were described were analyzed. We know, therefore, more about the inner structure of these marital martyrs than does the casual observer, including the patients themselves. What was found to be the basis of their chronic irritation with trifles?

Mr. A.'s Irritating Trifle: The phrase "If you know what I mean."

Mrs. A.'s (his wife) Irritating Trifle: "Criticism of her expressions."

Mr. A., at the age of thirty-one, married a beauty of twenty-two. Some of his friends warned him, pointing out that the girl was "cute but immature." Mr. A. promised himself that he would "enjoy her cuteness" and "develop" her immaturity.

The educational process was soon impeded by his

wife's "stubbornness." He had the feeling that she resented his never-ending attempts at her intellectual betterment and was holding on to her "idiotic notions even though she knew better." He was, however, extremely tolerant in his pedagogic efforts, always reminding himself that his wife was immature. He was no less tolerant of her approach to sex: sex was rationed according to her idea that too frequent intercourse "diminishes beauty." Her refrain was: "You want me to look nice, don't you, darling?" The husband had to overlook a few other "details," too, such as frigidity, overspending, preoccupation with clothes, and gossip. With a superior and benevolent smile, he treated his wife as a kind of doll. Only on one point was he intolerant: the phrase "if you know what I mean" made him "see red."

Analysis of Mr. A. revealed that he was acting with his wife his own mother-child situation in reverse. He was the only child of a marriage of convenience, his parents treating one another as strangers and with "complete indifference." His mother loved the child, "though in some distant way." She was given to long educational sermons which the child accepted "because she talked to me. I remember that during her preaching and teachings I listened fascinated to her voice, thinking: what a beautiful voice she has." He never resented her admonitions: actually he did not even hear them.

He married his wife not despite but because of her immaturity, though, of course, he was not aware of that fact. Unconsciously he reversed the roles of his infantile conflict, himself acting the part of the educating mother, reducing his wife to the image of himself as child. Hence his patience and tolerance.

The irritating phrase represented for him an unconscious reminder that his "game" had not been accepted at face value. "If you know what I mean," spelled for him: "That woman has a mind of her own and fools you by her alleged submissiveness, as you did your mother, though for different reasons." The phrase represented also his superego's reproach that his little marital game was irrational.

A specific scene which took place in A.'s seventh year, bore out the correctness of that reconstruction. During a walk in Central Park, his mother delivered one of her educational speeches. The boy interrupted with the words: "I don't believe that." Whereupon his mother went into a rage: "Look who's talking and has an opinion." Peace was restored with the boy's apology.

The interesting aspect of his analysis was that, after working out the pattern he was unconsciously repeating on the marital scene, he lost interest in his educational game and started to upbraid his wife furiously for her "mental immaturity," thus shifting projectively the reproaches of his own conscience. He was forced to take a long business trip and insisted that meanwhile his wife enter analysis. She did so "reluctantly," only to please her husband.

"What's wrong with you?" I wanted to know.

"Nothing," she said definitely. "I am a very healthy person when I can endure the idiotic teaching and preaching which has been my impossible husband's only conversation for six long years. You don't know how irritating and boring his tirades can be. And now he is worse than ever. Before you analyzed him, I could appease him by listening and letting him run his course. But now he just nags, calls me 'immature,' and is intolerant."

"How about growing up yourself?"

"I don't claim that I'm an intellectual giant. On the other hand, I'm not the moron my husband makes me out to be."

"Why do you, by the way, use the irritating phrase 'If you know what I mean?' Where's your marital diplomacy?"

"I believe I showed a great deal of diplomacy in standing for his preaching and teaching benders. Sometimes I just get impatient and before I can bite my tongue, the words are out of my mouth."

"Is that your slave rebellion?"

Mrs. A. replied laughingly: "Something like that."

"Whom do you imitate? Who used that expression?"

"I don't know. It is like saying 'Well.'"

Analysis of Mrs. A. was impeded for a longer period of time by two factors. First, she did not consider herself in need of treatment—"I'm a perfectly healthy person"—and, secondly, she was furious with me for "complicating her complicated marriage." Specifically, she blamed me for deterioration of her husband's behavior. It was fruitless to try to show her that the fact that her husband consulted me was proof positive he felt dissatisfied with his marriage. In these discussions she showed herself extremely opinionated, stubborn, and completely inaccessible to reason. She refused to consult another psychiatrist, she refused likewise to concede that her behavior had any connection with her marital troubles. She blamed besides myself a "stupid cocktail party" which took place during the Roosevelt-Willkie presidential campaign.

A few of her husband's friends were discussing Roosevelt's health and spoke about his possible death during

the third term. "What of it?" asked the lady. "Willkie will succeed him, if you know what I mean." It turned out that she thought the Constitution contained a provision that in case a president dies during his tenure of office, he is succeeded by his opponent in the last campaign. Her husband rescued the situation by the remark: "My wife suggested that amendment to the Constitution; she believes on psychological grounds that the mere existence of that provision will prolong a president's life: nobody wants to be succeeded by his opponent . . ." The listeners considered the whole thing a good joke. The woman's husband, however, being conscious of her ignorance, was furious and later gave her a thorough dressing down. Even he understood that her "immaturity" made him ridiculous.

After having exhausted her anger with me, the cocktail party, and the Constitution, Mrs. A. found another scapegoat: she could not talk to me because I was an "intellectual." She pronounced the word with the disgust of a lady dealing with a four-letter word. I admitted that I did not understand what she meant. This offered an opportunity of discussing her rejection of intellectualism and knowledge in general. It turned out that behind that rejection was hidden a deep feeling of guilt pertaining to her "lack of thinking." Listening to her endless stream of talk, one first got the impression that she really was a foolish woman with a low I.Q. On the other hand, she was quite smart at times in evaluating people. The dichotomy was not understandable, nor did it tally with her ridiculous overvaluation of her beauty. One sometimes got the impression that she seriously believed that beauty is a substitute for intelligence.



Her family situation, and subsequent psychic elaboration of it, finally provided an answer. There were two children, a brother two years her senior, and she. The father was a weak man, completely under the thumb of his wife. The patient suffered as a child from the realization that her father preferred the boy—at least consciously. Her mother was a fighter for women's rights, and pampered the girl, constantly stressing that in the new brave world women had conquered, she enjoyed equal rights with men. During pre-puberty she overheard her parents discussing whether or not she should be sent to college, as the boy was to be. Her father had one of his infrequent attacks of rebellion and shouted: "That girl is a goodlooking moron, intellectually a misfit—if you know what I mean." Her mother objected furiously. The whole scene was repressed and came to the fore only after long pressure and "working through." I broke the ice by giving her my definition of a neurotic intellectual: a man who comes to wrong conclusions on the basis of deep and learned thinking. This finally convinced her that I was not prejudiced against intellectual women and did not "defend the dumbest man only because he is a man."

Her father's remark stabilized in her an impression stemming from the earliest years of sibling rivalry: "Competition with men is hopeless because of biologic facts; they will never accept you as an equal." As a result of that erroneous conclusion, built upon a masochistic substructure, the girl retired from "intellectualism" altogether, in fact, made fun of it by inner irony. Many of her foolish and provocative remarks, introduced or ending with "If you know what I mean," were of that pattern. Mrs. A.

reduced "intellectualism" to absurdity, offering herself as a living caricature.

After relinquishing intellectual competition, the future Mrs. A. resorted to her beauty as her "only asset." Her rejection of men and stressing of her body as a "weapon" resulted in frigidity and anti-intellectualism; she became a malignant flirt in order to "humiliate" men.

It was amazing to what degree Mrs. A. changed, after her self-imposed intellectual block, imbued with psychic masochism, was removed.

In the cases of Mr. and Mrs. A. the phrase "If you know what I mean," had deep unconscious significance for both marriage partners. Their whole mutual neurotic conflict was contained in these "harmless" six words!

Mr. B.'s Irritating Trifle: "Half-open mouth, head slightly deflected to the left, indicating impatience to talk."

Mr. B. had been married for eight years and considered himself "definitely" the victim of his wife's garrulity. "I had no idea that she could talk so much, so fast, and so constantly. You don't know what her chatter does to me. In our earlier years I wasn't irritated at all with her stories; I even found them amusing. My tolerance diminished, her stories lengthened, and so did my anger. Would you believe it that I, a really patient and tolerant man, could murder her at such times?"

Mr. B., "the personification of a peace-loving man," as he called himself, had twice before been the victim of garrulous women. His first marriage ended in divorce because of violent conflicts with his mother-in-law: "My

first wife was as a personality a harmless nobody completely under the dominance of her hyperaggressive and hypertalkative mother." Mr. B. claimed that "that bitch" tried to arrange his life: "It looked as if I might as well be married to two women. Nobody can stand that."

"Were you familiar with your first wife's dependence on her mother before marrying her?"

"Yes and no. I was not blind and saw quickly who was the real boss in the family. I had a foolish hope of cutting the neurotic cord between mother and daughter."

"How successful were you in that hopeless operation?"

"Well, it was an illusion. What happened was that my wife would be noncommittal in decisions before asking her mother, but would change into a determined executive organ of her mother's wishes after talking it over with her. It was in effect not a marriage but a triangle. The woman behind the scene, my mother-in-law, dominated my life."

"Was your wife garrulous?"

"No, she wasn't. More precisely, she constantly repeated like a parrot what her darling mother had told her. And that woman was garrulous to the nth degree. As a gramophone of my mother-in-law's chatter, my wife was a chatterbox. For herself, she was reticent."

"What did you do to remedy the situation?"

"I protested vigorously. During one of these quarrels my mother-in-law slapped my face so brutally that I acquired a stiff neck which lasted for weeks."

"What was that?"

"I was reproaching my mother-in-law for meddling and interfering in my marriage. After a regular barrage of words, she slapped my left cheek. My neck became fixed

in the position I was holding it in during the quarrel, and subsequently, I was in medical treatment. That gave the final push to the unavoidable divorce."

"For how long did your torticollis last?"

"Six weeks. I got electrical treatment."

"Did the physician suspect that a neurotic reaction might have been involved? Did he tell you that you petrified in your inability to move the injustice done to you?"

"No. We both believed that some sort of neuritis was involved. I still believe that it was organic in nature."

"Very convenient. In any case, you divorced your wife and remarried shortly afterwards?"

"I did, after eight months. This time I was determined to avoid my mistake and deliberately chose an orphan."

"Is she mute, too?"

"I did not go that far. She is nice and reticent with me. Her garrulity is restricted to company."

"And that makes you furious?"

"It does. I know. I'm irrational about it. Instead of being grateful for peace at home, I think about her chatter at parties, dinners, and other gatherings."

Mr. B.'s childhood situation had been rather unusual; he had grown up in an almost silent household. Both his parents had used words sparingly; meals were taken with a minimum of words. Why the parents had not talked to each other and to him was not clear to the patient. He had first attributed it to sheer malice and anger; later in life he came to the conclusion that both his parents were unhappy and highly neurotic. In any case, the child felt deprived of human warmth and the kindness of loving words. Instead of correcting the situation later in life, as a normal person would have done, he preferred the silent

and reticent type. In the choice of his wives, his early wish for greater verbal communication was visible. Both his wives were garrulous, though easily intimidated by the reticent husband who insisted upon silence.

The patient had an unusually fine ear for the malice hidden behind gossipy hypertalkativeness. Consciously he hated aggressive women, but twice he chose garrulous wives. His motives, could be elicited only after analyzing his reactions to his home situation. Considering the silence reigning in his parental home as personal malice, he became masochistically attached to that feeling of being victimized and remained stabilized on the rejection level. Later, he discarded the equation: silence="malice" by adopting the notion that cultured people use a minimum of words. To counteract the reproach of his superego, he unconsciously started to prove to himself that people who talk a great deal are also malicious. He married first not his first wife, but, intrapsychically, his talkative and rather malicious mother-in-law. When she slapped his face, it was to him definite proof of his defensive theory. There was little doubt that his stiff neck represented not a neurological condition but a frozen accusation of feminine malice, pertaining to the deteriorated mother-image.

In his second marriage he tried consciously to avoid parental interference and married an orphan. Once more, he was thrown with a chatterbox who restrained her chatter only at home. By no conscious means can one prevent an unconsciously desired inner mechanism from re-emergence.

A detail in the man's description of the irritating trifle proved conclusively that he even falsified external facts

to suit his inner need. He had said specifically: "That half-open mouth, head slightly deflected to the *left*, are for me storm signals . . ." I drew his attention to the fact that his description could not be correct in every detail; otherwise his wife must talk only to people who were, for some mysterious reason, always at her left. I suspected that Mr. B. projected upon his second wife his own position at the time his mother-in-law slapped his face. It turned out that the suspicion was justified: he had been standing face to face with his mother-in-law who, being right handed, had slapped his left cheek. No less suspicious was the fact that the patient was most irritated with his second wife at parties, where people usually are standing, moving from one group to the other. Decisive was his observation that at a subsequent party his wife turned her head to the right, nevertheless he caught himself objecting: "Why does the damn woman move her head to the *left* . . ."

In the irritating trifle was condensed his whole infantile conflict. It represented the eternal reproach of his superego: "You want to be mistreated and rejected," ward off with anger.

Mr. C. Irritating Trifle: "Governess-like tone."

The patient, aged forty-two, complained about his wife's "educating and reprimanding him." He was bothered not so much by her objections as by the tone of her voice.

"What about your wife's objections? What are they about? Are they justified?"

"I must admit that they are. Sometimes I am irritated

with her and do behave in a way not prescribed by Emily Post."

"Would you care to be more specific?"

"For instance, in the restaurant yesterday I ordered first for myself. I did it because I was hungry and my wife studied the menu endlessly."

"What happened?"

"She told me that I behaved unlike a gentleman. I laughed and admitted it. Immediately afterwards, I felt hot anger at her tone of voice. She spoke like a malicious governess scolding a child. I just told her there was no fun in being with a governess."

"And made it worse?"

"Sure. She was deeply hurt."

"Surprised?"

"No. I know that such scenes are better avoided. They don't pay. The usual routine is that I apologize for my 'misbehavior.' Sometimes I feel the whole scene could be prevented, but before I think, the words are already out of my mouth, and the damage is done."

"In other words, you admit that you provoke the scene?"

"That's a strange way to put it. I would rather say that I can't help myself. Marriage is a cage, and when you are constantly with the same person, she is not only the beneficiary of your good moods, but also the victim of your rare irritation. What's strange about it? Didn't she promise: For better and for worse?"

"How do you enlarge the 'cage' by rebelling inefficiently?"

"Everybody has some vestiges of self-respect—even a worm of a husband."

I persisted. "What has your so-called self-respect to do with provoking a scene in which you railroad yourself into a position that gives your wife the edge in the argument—an argument which ends traditionally with your humble apology?"

"I apologize only for peace's sake."

"But peace could be preserved more effectively before a war with predictable defeat was started."

"Quite true. But I have no control over my emotions in such situations."

"Have you at least figured out why your wife's governess-like tone irritates you so much?"

"I'm an independent person, I guess."

"You can do better than that."

"Well, I could also say that at my age my education is already concluded."

"Why do you provoke scenes proving the opposite?"

"I rebel against the hypocrisy of putting women on a pedestal. They have equal rights, haven't they? These women want all the advantages of equality and, at the same time, the old privileges granted to them on the assumption of being the 'weaker sex.' As long as women were socially, economically, and legally pariahs, the code of gallantry made sense. Nowadays, the situation which gave rise to the nonsense of gallantry is changed, and still women insist on the outdated rules."

"Quite a fighter against feminine prerogatives, aren't you?"

Mr. C. retorted laughingly: "We live in a funny world."

"Why not accept the rules of civilized conduct? Would you—to quote a poet—object to the rules of bridge or whist?"



"That's different."

"The main point is: you cannot explain why your wife's 'tone of a governess' in certain situations irritates you so deeply?"

"I've already told you the reasons."

"You mean: the conscious reasons."

Mr. C. entered analysis. His main complaint was that despite his external success, he remained dissatisfied. That dissatisfaction was by no means confined to his marriage alone. Everything "bored" him. His dissatisfaction was *de facto* a considerable neurotic depression.

His life-history revealed that he was a typical psychic masochist. Without being aware of doing so, he constructed situations in which somebody was unjust to him; that he maneuvered himself into his dilemmas was a fact of which he was not at all conscious. After having achieved his daily dose of injustice, he reveled in orgies of hatred, and at the same time pitied himself extensively.

His proud and reticent mother was misunderstood by the child as being cold and rejecting. He felt that all his attempts to gain her love and even attention were futile, and he remembered situations in which he had felt "bitter hatred" toward her. Only in analysis did he remember the self-pity and self-commiseration which preceded that alleged hatred. He remembered, for example, an occasion when he was taken to his grandmother's on a cold winter day. His mother used a shawl to protect the child, and fastened it with a safety pin. In her hurry she accidentally stuck the pin through the superficial skin-layers of his chin. The boy felt intense pain but neither protested nor cried out. Only when a few drops of blood became visible did his mother realize what had happened, and asked, surprised: "Why didn't you tell me?" In evaluating that

scene—the boy was not yet four, as could be proven by the date of his grandmother's death, which occurred when he was four—the patient claimed that he felt so hopelessly at a disadvantage in his desperate fight for his mother's affection, that "anything, including pain, was preferable to neglect and oversight." Later, he changed his line of reasoning and said that it seemed possible to him that he had wanted to make his mother sorry for him. What he did not even suspect was that he had at that early age established a technique of misusing a situation in order to feel himself the "victim" of an injustice. He was truly an "injustice collector," who *unconsciously enjoyed the strangest and most dangerous pleasure known to mankind: psychic masochism.*

Mr. C.'s whole life proved conclusively that rejection was his unconscious aim. He did everything the hard way. He was proud of being a self-made man and regarded his environment with bitterness and hatred—the same environment, by the way, that he fought with desperate determination, hitting mostly below the belt to make sure he would be hit back twice as hard. Like all psychic masochists, he was never aware of his own provocation, but was very conscious of the injustice of the world.

Mr. C. remembered that he looked at girls, at the time of puberty and long after, with constant reproach. He felt left out, rejected, and deprived. He busily collected small narcissistic defeats, and was bitter and demanding at inopportune times. A few girls told him that his technique of wooing them defeated his own purpose: "You cannot beg and command at the same time. You push a girl into saying 'no,' even before she opens her mouth." Instinctively, these girls felt that he did not really want them. One of them said: "At the time you begged and

demanding, you were bitter and seemed to expect my 'no'—but you were <sup>emotionally</sup> high-pitched. Now, after having gotten your way, you are cynical and bored. What's the matter with you, anyway?"

Later, Mr. C. began hating "aggressive" girls. He fell in love with a kind and lovable woman who understood the child in him. "I just fell for the baby-stuff she served in reverse: I was her baby. I had never felt that way—I married her. We have been reasonably happy, but from time to time when she talks like a governess I get furious with her. She reminds me then of her mother, an aggressive bitch."

That was, of course, a cover-memory. When his wife started talking like a governess, she reminded him unconsciously of his image of his own mother. His inner conscience took in the situation, saying: "See what you really want—an aggressive, nagging woman." In other words, his inner conscience showed him the mirrored image of his own old but never inwardly relinquished masochistic infantile wish. To counteract that reproach, he would become furious with his wife, not without first having provoked her governess-like attitude.

What finally convinced the patient was that he had to admit he frequently knew "what will follow when I behave in a specific way with my wife." That is, he realized he provoked scenes of self-humiliation.

Mrs. D.'s Irritating Trifle: The gesture of smoothing the hair.

Mrs. D. was proud of her husband though she could not "stand him." His main virtue consisted of his being a "really distinguished gentleman."

"Meaning what, exactly?" I asked.

"Just distinguished. He looks like a member of the diplomatic corps, as long as he doesn't open his mouth. Perhaps that's the reason he's as taciturn as the grave."

When I pressed her to be more specific, she said:

"Well, he is reserved, silent, and reticent. Some people call him cold and arrogant."

"Does he apply that attitude toward you, too?"

"That's exactly the point. He has his frozen pose and nothing can bring him out of it. In private he acts exactly as he does in public."

"You mean then that you admire his snobbish attitude in public and resent it at home?"

"Not exactly, but something along those lines. I know that his snobbishness, as you call it, is fake, and still—I fall for it."

"Any idea why?"

"I hate vulgarity in any form or fashion."

"What about his irritating gesture of smoothing his hair? Is this too a part of the diplomatic training?"

"Don't rub it in. I know that I'm slightly ridiculous in my whole approach. Still, there it is: his gesture makes me furious."

"Why?"

"I've asked myself that same question hundreds of times. It seems to me the very incarnation of conceit—and slightly plebeian."

"Have you told your husband you feel he steps out of role by using that gesture so often?"

"I have. He's not always conscious of doing it. He ignores my remarks with distinguished silence."

"Make up your mind; do you admire or ridicule the foreign-office attitude?"

"Touché. I obviously do both."

"Nothing else irritates you in your husband?"

"I believe that I simplified facts for you; many things in his whole attitude needle me. But I can reconcile them with my basic admiration of his distinction. Just on one little point I'm helpless—the famous gesture."

"How about the department of tenderness?"

"The answer is simple: He's an ice block, but I console myself with the understanding that I can't have it both ways."

"Do distinguished diplomats never lose their reserve?"

Mrs. D. laughed. "You cannot make more fun of my childlike admiration of the foreign-office attitude than I do myself. I like it though it's more than funny."

"How do you get along sexually with your husband?"

"Must I answer that question?"

"Do you want me to believe that you consulted me to complain only of your husband's irritating gesture?"

"In a way—I did."

"And the other way?"

It turned out that Mrs. D. was frigid and had begun to wonder whether she was not wasting her life "running after a second-hand edition of an Anthony Eden-type."

Mrs. D.'s analysis produced the following family background. She came from a poor middle-class family, her mother implanting in the only child an admiration for distinguished aloofness. The words "plebeian" and "vulgar" were synonyms for sin and degradation. She went through a period in life in which she hated her mother and pitied her "rather undistinguished" father, whom

her mother treated as a "vulgar nonentity." In puberty she attached herself repeatedly to such "outcasts," and fell into "bad company." Out of neurotic compensatory hatred of her mother, she was even (for a few months) the girl-friend of a half-gangster. She had an abortion and subsequently became converted to her mother's point of view, though her mother knew little of her escapades. Then she met her future husband and fell "madly in love" with him. She could never quite understand why she was "irresistibly attracted to that intellectual nobody" whose only asset consisted of a "stony face, a mouth chronically shut, and erect posture."

Analysis showed that unconsciously, Mrs. D. was pathologically attached to her mother. She was near overt homosexuality and admitted later that she slept with two Lesbians during her "gangster period." The homosexual attachment showed the typical three-layer structure of Lesbianism in general\*: deeply repressed masochistic attachment to the mother; an equally repressed pseudo-aggressive reversal—I hate you—as an alibi; and finally, a layer of pseudo-love to ward off that guilt-laden hatred.

That three-layer structure explained a series of contradictory traits and actions in Mrs. D's behavior. All her puberal and postpuberal "transgressions in the forbidden" (what she called her "gangster era") were futile attempts to escape her masochistic attachment through pseudo-aggression. Her spiteful feeling toward her mother was finally solved by complete submission: she "fell in love" not with the real man but with the ideal set up by her mother, who enthusiastically ap-

\* For an elaboration see the author's *The Basic Neurosis*, Grune and Stratton, 1949.

proved of her daughter's choice. It was tragic *quid pro quo*, and inwardly an ironical one also. It was a complaint, deeply repressed, directed toward the "bad" mother: "Look what a caricature you have forced on me."

Where did the pathologic irritation with the undiplomatic gesture come in? It turned out that Mrs. D's mother used the same gesture. That recollection was repressed and came as a "shock" to her, the moment it was shown to her in analysis that her choice of a husband was unexplainable without an understanding of her homosexual attachment to her mother. Mother's gesture was for her the original "incarnation of selfishness and exclusive self-love." This reproach was later shifted to the rather stupid husband. Her mother's gesture finally made it clear to the child that there was no emotional approach to that cold and disappointed woman, and fostered her masochistic attachment.

The irritation with her husband's gesture was a constant inner reminder that she "loved" a person—mother, later husband—who was neurotically incapable of tender emotions. It was also a reminder of her enshrined masochistic attachment, underlining the fact that submission to her mother's wishes had not secured real love. That reminder she warded off with defensive fury.

Mrs. E's Irritating Trifle: Husband's facial expression when writing checks.

Mrs. E., a woman of thirty-two, in analysis because of neurotic headaches, stated specifically that her conflicts with her husband were "rather insignificant." Asked

whether she meant in quantity or quality, she answered: "I meant both." Still, she connected the one irritating trifle with her headaches, for which no organic reason could be found. "If I catch a glimpse at my husband's expression when he's writing out checks, I immediately get a headache. I've tried to avoid looking at him, but nothing helps; I can see his check-signing expression in my imagination. The trouble is that my headaches are very persistent: I pay for a few seconds of looking at my husband with a few days of predisposition for headaches. That means I don't have them all the time—they are worst at the beginning of the month, the time of check-signing—but I'm liable to get them repeatedly. What a life . . ."

Mrs. E. described her husband as a "harmless and rather nice person." When I asked her if she was contented in her marriage, she replied:

"I expected you to ask: Are you happy in your marriage?"

"Did you prepare an answer?"

"I expected your question and thought a good deal about how to answer. But to be frank, I don't know. We live a quiet life and if my headaches don't interfere—"

"—I wait for the next headache?"

Mrs. E. smiled like a schoolgirl caught in some mischief. "I must admit that my sickness absorbs too much of my thoughts."

"Do you consider your husband stingy?"

"Not at all. He is quite generous. Our situation has improved a good deal during the last three years from the financial angle."

"How long have you been married?"



"Seven years."

"Did you have an occupation—outside of managing your home—in the beginning of your married life?"

"I wanted to; I am an industrial designer, but my husband wouldn't allow me to work."

"Why?"

"I believe because of our acquaintances. He felt it would reflect on him and that people would think he is incapable of supporting his wife."

"Do you think he resented the fact that you didn't work, even though he insisted that you shouldn't?"

"I don't think so. He really wants me to have a good time."

"Do you?"

"Well, I'm sick."

Mrs. E.'s headaches could soon be understood as a psychosomatic sign representing repressed fury. At once the question arose of what her fury signified.

In her childhood she had been confronted with an aggressive, domineering father and a weak, submissive mother. She lived in constant fear of her father, whom she considered a tyrant, full of inconsistencies. He constantly stressed the necessity for work, though as a traveling salesman for a big concern, he gave the impression of having a good time. Nevertheless, he complained regularly on returning home after long absences that he "worked himself to death." He was stingy, meticulous, and nagging. Every minute of rest or recreation either his wife or daughter took, he resented, denouncing them with bitter irony and sarcasm for "laziness" and "stealing time." He was, by Mrs. E.'s description, a "merciless slaveholder, irrational and cruel." He had a peculiar tal-

ent for making even agreeable work into a disagreeable duty. The words "duty to work" were constantly on his lips. At home he played an "oriental Pasha," demanding, shouting, accusing, developing in wife and child the feeling that he considered them both parasites.

Consciously, Mrs. E. felt unhappy when not working. She worked with furious energy, never took a vacation, and her output as an industrial designer was quantitatively remarkable. She worked as if a person holding a whip were constantly behind her. On the other hand, also consciously, she hated work in any form or fashion.

When she met her future husband, she was immediately fascinated by his opinions about working women. He said frankly that he believed women belonged in the home; he was opposed to women working "when their husbands can provide a comfortable home." The future Mrs. E. was full of surprise that a person with such opinions should exist at all. Though she saw through the man's weakness—"he needed an adornment and not a wife"—and his narcissistic compensations, she married him. Sex was spotty and unsatisfactory, but all the disadvantages were overlooked: "I enjoyed for the first time in my life the sensation of work as pleasure." At first that work consisted of all the innumerable chores involved in putting the finishing touches to a remodeled apartment, later in supervising housework done by a maid.

After a few months the elation wore off and Mrs. E. started to experiment with her old type of work and draw "for fun." Her husband resented it; they compromised on book-illustrations. Only for fun, she illustrated a book propagandizing the beauty of work. She was fas-

minated with the description in Genesis of how Adam and Eve, expelled from Paradise, had to work as a punishment.

Mrs. E. could not explain her contradictory approach to work. "My father imbued me with the idea of work as duty; my husband had, as far as women were concerned, the opposite views. I accepted his ideas and wanted to work, this time for pleasure."

What Mrs. E. did not even suspect was the fact that she used the problem of work as a hitching post for her deep masochistic attachment to her father. In her suppressed fury—manifesting itself in headaches—she acted the enraged father confronted with "laziness." The trouble was that she was desperately clinging to "work as punishment," and accepted her husband's ideas only superficially. Even there, she felt with correct intuition that he, too, harbored basically the same ideas about work as did her father, though his sensitiveness to the possible criticism of society prevented him from assuming officially the same attitude.

The grotesque fact was observable that Mrs. E. could not adapt herself to the "new approach" to work: her wish to be mistreated was—homeless.

An interesting detail came to the fore. Her father when confronted with a request for money first shouted his head off about unreasonable demands and murderous expenses, then complained about those two "parasitic women," and finally pitied himself, concluding with disgust: "You both give me a headache." Without knowing it, Mrs. E. dramatized that headache, too.

Her husband's facial expression when writing checks—the "irritating trifle"—represented for Mrs. E. the high

point of her conflict. That "pompous expression" reminded her unconsciously of her father's attitude, and thereby of her own unconscious wish to be treated as a "lazy misfit." The inner defense was fury—projected upon the innocent-guilty husband.

Mrs. F.'s Irritating Trifle: A handkerchief.

Mrs. F. complained that a "stupid" handkerchief was the center of her specific marital conflict. The "infinite care" with which her husband put the "damn rag" in his suit infuriated her. Even the mere thought of it irritated her beyond control.

What were the psychic facts behind that omnipotent "trifle"? Mrs. F. had been married for seven years. She was a hysterical woman who never accepted "masculine prerogatives." Irrationally and furiously she fought the slightest inequality, constantly complaining about "stinking, man-made institutions." She entered analysis because of frigidity; her anger with men was also an irrational misuse of biologic facts. Her whole life before puberty had been filled with competition with her brother, two years her junior. She called the world we live in a "malodorous man-made place," and meant essentially the sex-difference. She had chosen as a husband a weakling whom she treated miserably. Yet, even in this personified Mr. Milquetoast she saw and hated "masculine arrogance," and was oblivious to her own campaign of revenge. Her feeling about the handkerchief was easily explained by an experience—"long forgotten"—which she had had at puberty. She had not been precisely informed about menstruation: her first

"attack," as she expressed it, occurred during lunchtime in school. She believed herself to be injured and used her handkerchief. That scene was for her, as she later remembered, "the epitome of woman's dreary fate." The harmless fact that men carry handkerchiefs in the breast-pocket as "trimming, like a medal to show off," made her furious, though she never connected her "handkerchief-humiliation" with her fury.

The fact that the key-word "handkerchief" simply crystallized her rejection of femininity,\* explains also why all her precautionary measures—sending her husband out of the room to put the handkerchief in his pocket, or putting it in herself—did not help. She still imagined the little ceremony and continued to be furious.

Summarizing, we can state on the basis of clinical material that all the irritating trifles analyzed had the following six features in common:

1. They were reminders of unconscious conflicts within the irritated person himself.
2. Only secondarily were these conflicts shifted upon the mate; the irritating trifles, observed in the marriage partner, thus became the crystallization point for a specific inner conflict, varying with the individual.
3. In each case the inner conscience reminded the irritated person that he, or she, still harbored the specific individual conflict and even enjoyed it.
4. In inner defense, anger was mobilized as alibi: "I don't enjoy my conflict: on the contrary, I hate it; see how irritated I am."

\* The example is paradigmatic for "creation" of individual symbols. First comes establishment of a complex, later a hitching post. The latter comprises and attaches itself to individual experiences.

5. The irritation with trifles was maintained and perpetuated precisely because of the alibi involved.

6. In each case the particular habit which gave such offense was also the expression of a conflict in the offending person himself (this was the case in all the persons analyzed); or—this possibility cannot be fully excluded—the power of that particular habit to irritate was discovered accidentally and the habit maintained precisely because of its nuisance value, thus giving vent to other specific conflicts. In the latter case, both husband and wife can use it, either to express their repressed defensive aggression, or, more frequently, as a weapon of provocation.

The irritating trifle thus reduces to a reproach of the inner conscience—relating to repressed wishes and automatically resultant defenses—warded off with the alibi of anger. The entire process is unconscious and centered exclusively around the irritated person. The irritating partner is merely a catalyst.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Precautions and Remedies

PEOPLE harbor the naive idea that adults are capable of learning decisively from experience. Being confronted with "great events," they learn their lesson—or so the theory goes. It is a nice theory—but unfortunately, only a theory.

First of all, the human being has emotionally no organ for perceiving "great events." Emotionally, only small, detail-experiences have access to the dynamic departments of the unconscious personality.

How does this come to pass? As usual, the nursery provides the answer. The serious fact is that it is hopeless to try to understand the actions and feelings of the adult without taking the child in him into consideration.

The typical adult energetically disclaims any connection between his present actions, feelings, and prejudices and his childhood. He has in his family album a series of snapshots of his nursery-past, and cherishes in his memory a few eclectically compiled harmless recollections from those "happy days." That is his tribute to the past—or so he thinks.

Without knowing it, he carries a heavier load. His emotional destiny was terminated, finally and irrevocably terminated, between the ages of two and five. At this

time *finis* was written to his emotional chapter, once and for all. What happened later were endless repetitions in new and more sophisticated guise of these childhood experiences.

Here we meet with furious objection. Let us quote a good spokesman for the cause of common sense, a patient.

"Well, that's pure and unattenuated nonsense. Like telling me that the moon is made of green cheese. Are you denying that we learn anything after the age of five? What's the whole school system for?"

"No," I answered, "nobody denies that our *intellectual* knowledge increases. What I am denying is that *affective* experiences—those that determine our emotional life—can be expanded after the age of five."

"Complete nonsense."

"It is, to quote Disraeli, 'easier to be critical than correct.' Every neurotic proves the stated dichotomy: petrified unconscious patterns are reeled off, *in changing* times, under *changing* external circumstances, with *changing* objects, but with eternal *internal monotony*."

"That's impossible. Even assuming for a split second that your statement corresponds to facts, it applies only to neurotics. What about normal people?"

"There exists only a quantitative difference between normalcy and neurosis. Everybody has neurotic tendencies; when these increase quantitatively in a person, one calls that person neurotic."

"Do you deny the existence of normal people?"

"It's a question of terminology. A normal person is a not too neurotic one."

"That's all?"



"That's all. Neurotics produce neurotic symptoms, signs, plus personality difficulties. Normal people have their peculiarities too; that means they are modestly concentrating on personality difficulties of a not too extensive nature. They don't recognize their difficulties as neurotic ones, though objectively they are carved out of the same wood. The quantity differs, not the quality."

"That's decisive."

"Less decisive than you think. Everybody harbors, for instance, self-damaging tendencies. In neurotics, they are overdimensional, ruining enjoyment, the ability to love, sometimes even work. The inner defense mechanisms of both groups are different; but both struggle with identical problems in varying quantities."

"Do you go so far as to claim the difference between normalcy and neurosis is insignificant?"

"Not at all. There are differences. Hegel discovered that there is a point where quantity changes quality. The pleasures both types enjoy are different: neurotics unconsciously enjoy materialization of repressed wishes, defenses against these wishes, and inner punishment, first endured, later masochistically sugarcoated; and pay for every ounce of that inner pleasure with tons of conscious unhappiness, depression, dissatisfaction. Their 'not too neurotic' brethren under the skin, the 'normal' persons whom you idealize, have more access to the conscious pleasures of reality, which they have achieved only after inwardly renouncing most infantile unconscious pleasures. Neither acquires a great bargain."

"What a pessimistic philosophy."

"To see facts does not imply pessimism. I am against idealizing normalcy and being supercilious about the

'foolishness' of neurotics. Neurotics are not fools; they simply pay an exaggerated price for infantile pleasures, though only unconsciously perceived."

"Still, you don't place great emphasis on the difference between normal and neurotic pleasures."

"The difference is not too imposing. Take as an example the ability to love tenderly. Neurotics are incapable of that emotion, though they do not believe it. Their emotional approach is 'transference': the blind repetitiveness of infantile patterns."

"What else?"

"A so-called normal person has a better adaptation to reality, better psychic digestion of the childlike fantasy we all cherished once upon a time that we are omnipotent."

"Think hard; perhaps you can find some more distinguishing marks between normalcy and neurosis."

I laughed. "Well, take the problem of aggression and activity in general. The neurotic as you know, is inwardly a glutton for punishment, and, though he doesn't know it, constantly seeks defeat. He is incapable of discharging his aggression without accompanying inner guilt, since he unconsciously identifies his changing antagonist with some person in his infantile past—against whom aggression was strictly forbidden. Consequently its re-emergence is punished with intense inner guilt. In contradistinction, the more normal person sees in the enemy a real person, whom he attacks only in self-defense; and hence experiences no guilt."

"Well, that's quite a difference."

"Nobody denies that differences do exist. The problem is, however, in its genesis, very similar, especially the

phase of it which interests us in this discussion: one's ability to be emotionally impressed by detail-experiences exclusively. In that respect, the difference is infinitesimal."

"What is the basis of that?"

"Confront a child of two to five with a specific disappointment, such as denial of candy when his stomach is perhaps upset. How does the child react? No matter how well the mother impresses on the child the objective reasons for her refusal, or how much or how little anger the child shows, emotionally the situation is clear-cut: 'I hate you.' And (this is decisive) his 'I hate you' pertains to the refuser as a whole person and not to a particular action of the refuser. An adult, who weighs pro and con, might make the mental distinction: 'I love you in general, but I am angry with you in this specific instance.'\* Nothing of this sort appears in the child's reaction: only a general 'I hate you' is discernible. The child reacts to specific particular disappointments with his total personality. Why should that irrational 'all-out' attitude persist? The child gets smart, learns to differentiate between what is good for him and what is not, and is later capable of taking unavoidable disappointment without hatred. One would expect then that his horizon would widen as his knowledge increased, and therefore he would outgrow the infantile one hundred percent emotional reaction to details. All good and sound reasoning, but it doesn't happen that way. The one hundred percent reaction to details persists; more, it becomes the emotional behavior-pattern of his lifetime.

\* It must be emphasized that even in the case of the adult, the distinction is purely an intellectual one—not emotionally felt. Intellectual reasoning and emotional feeling are not identical.

"Responsible for that strange fact is the inner feeling of guilt, which accompanies the child's anger at the 'sacred' parents who have offended his megalomania by refusing him. The child gets rid of this painful feeling of guilt by *magnifying the disappointing detail*. When the superego reprimands: 'You should love mother and father, they love you,' the child retorts: 'That may be so, but in this specific disappointment something terrible and irreparable happened to me. How can they both be so loving?' With stubbornness, the child clings to his magnified disappointments. The trifle is enlarged out of all proportion as an alibi; and becomes thus the emotional pattern projected upon reality. Once that emotional pattern is established and put into operation, nothing can change it, with the exception of psychiatric-analytic treatment. Cataclysmic events, including the atom bomb, cannot change it during the lifetime of the individual."

The patient, from his common-sense corner, asked rather maliciously: "Is this a generally accepted theory?"

I told him it was simply my private opinion which I had labeled the "theory of details." He then wanted to know if the theory had any practical application.

I explained: "That theory explains a number of otherwise unclarified facts. First, it explains why people are deeply impressed or hurt by trifles, and trifles exclusively. If it is true that our emotional life is regulated entirely by 'trifles' and detail-experiences, then there is no reason to wonder at the depth of the resultant feelings. Second, the theory accounts for the discrepancy between one's common-sense appreciation of the 'insignificance' of the specific irritating trifle, and the emotional disturbance

caused by the same 'trifle.' Third, the theory of details gives us a clue to why the deepest therapy in psychopathology, Freudian psychoanalysis, works only if the patient goes through a long series of emotional experiences in the transference-neurosis. In this process he repeats in *detail-experiences* his repressed conflicts of the past, detail-experiences constantly accompanied by the physician's explanations of the unconscious meaning of this involuntary repetitiveness."

The patient replied angrily: "You make it appear that we all labor under a *dictatorship of trifles* which you, for some reason, call 'detail-experience.' You claim that these trifles are looked at intrapsychically (also a nice word!) with an unconscious magnifying glass, and enlarged out of proportion. It seems to me rather the opposite: perhaps the magnifying glass is in your hands. I'm not being malicious; I can adduce a 'clinical argument,' to use one of your irritating phrases. I refer to the mistrust which the intelligent adult automatically shows when confronted with details, hyphen, trifles."

"I don't think that you are malicious," I said. "You are in the position of a man who has a perfectly good dollar bill in his hands, and wants to buy some wares on another planet which he has reached, let us say, in an atomically propelled vehicle. The inhabitants of that planet, however, have a completely different currency. This does not prove that his bill is bogus money. Nobody denies that common sense, erroneously called logic, is applicable to conscious processes as far as they are not unconsciously determined. But it is not applicable to the unconscious, where a different currency—that of irrational emotions—is in use. Your objection—the intelli-

gent adult's typical mistrust of trifles—is a boomerang. You are overlooking the fact that the adult represses his emotional past; hence his rejection of details.”

Adults are very smug in their approach to emotional reactions. They seriously believe that common sense, intelligence, and “realistic” evaluation, are the guideposts of unconsciously determined actions. That erroneous assumption is as naive as it is ineffective. Can you argue “logically” with a person in love? Or with one who is beside himself with anger and fury?

The next time you meet a person who superciliously points out how “foolishly” somebody reacts to details, tell him this: precisely those details are the contents of our emotional life.

Instinctively, married couples take various precautions to keep from being too irritated by trifles. Some of the most usual devices are to:

*“Keep smiling and don’t take it seriously.”*

This autosuggestion is as universal as it is ineffective. “Logical” proof that an irritating trifle is indeed a trifle, is superfluous, because the irritated person is quite conscious of the fact. It is precisely the discrepancy between the overdimensional anger and the microscopic trifle that causes the external conflict.

*“Overlook it.”*

A woman patient told me: “Every time I burst with irrational anger against my husband’s Lilliput-crimes, I tell myself: ‘Just overlook it.’ Do you think it helps? It doesn’t. The stupid resentment comes back again and again.”

*“Get away from each other.”*

A patient had an agreement of long standing with his wife that when they were in a bad mood, one or the other would utter a formula they had devised and that they then would "separate" immediately and retire to their respective rooms. The result? Both said that "they moped separately instead of moping together." In the beginning the advantage consisted of the fact that "all the ugly words were at least not spoken aloud; consequently mutual apologies were not necessary." Later, that advantage was lost, because they began to worm out of each other what their private thoughts had been.

*"Think of something pleasant."*

I quote a patient, a man of 40: "My technique in coping with marital trifles is to think of something pleasant. First, I used to imagine a card game which I was winning; after a while that lost interest for me, and I would think of a girl I had known before I was married. That, too, was soon worn out, and in my desperation I began to recall scenes from my honeymoon. But every device was short-lived; thinking about our honeymoon was positively dangerous. I had difficulty even in finding pleasant scenes with my wife to recall; I couldn't even remember what she had been like. In the end I shifted to scenery and imagined the places we had visited. That remedy, too, ended in a case of blurred vision."

*"Avoid the painful situation."*

We heard from Mrs. F. (the lady who was chronically irritated by the way her husband adjusted his handkerchief) that she tried a number of protective devices: she put the handkerchief into his pocket herself; she told him not to do it in her presence; but even when she did not

actually witness the act, she imagined it, with identical results.

Mrs. F.'s unsuccessful precautions show how little reality has to do with one's irritation. Were reality, *per se*, responsible, then elimination of the reality factor would automatically result in elimination of the irritation. What happens instead? For reality is substituted imagination. This seemingly senseless perseverance becomes meaningful the moment we take into account our main thesis: Irritating trifles are but hitching-posts for deeper conflicts.

There exists an old anecdote illustrating the point: A man who comes home regularly at three in the morning has the habit of dropping his shoes loudly on the floor when undressing. A neighbor complains and the culprit determines to mend his ways. Coming home the next night, he forgets his good intentions and throws the left shoe—as usual—on the floor. Then he remembers his resolve and puts the right shoe down with care, avoiding all noise. Some time later, he is awakened by a telephone call from his neighbor, urging him to throw the second shoe: "I've been waiting now for three hours . . ."

This strange persistence in "waiting for the next blow" explains why all devices to avoid the irritation are fruitless. It is simply not true that the trifle causes the irritation; the subterranean irritation searches for an outlet and finds one, crystallized in the trifle.

"Be tolerant."

A patient of mine, an industrialist, worked on a number of tolerance committees and donated great sums of money to that cause. At home, he was completely intolerant of his wife's "peculiarities." He finally found a "short



formula" to counteract his private intolerance. It was the motto of his pet organization.

"Does your remedy work?" I wanted to know.

"Theoretically, yes. Practically, no."

"How do you explain that?"

"You don't know my wife."

"Don't take me seriously."

A patient, a man of thirty-six, married for five years, told me that he had an agreement with his wife "not to take me seriously when I'm shouting about some trifle." The main irritant was the way his wife talked about her constantly expendable maids. She could not get along with the girls and spoke in a disparaging tone about them, but her husband was convinced that his wife was to blame. The device of not being taken seriously worked for a short while, then it collapsed for two reasons: "My wife extended the privilege and pigeonholed every complaint in that category. To make it even worse, I found that she smiled condescendingly at my furious outbreaks. That impertinence made me even more furious."

*Overestimation of trifles.*

In some cases, the irritation of trifles is justified by the victim in a paradoxical way: by overestimating the trifle per se. A patient came to the conclusion, long before entering analysis, that "trifles are not trifles at all. They are important. What appears to be a small and insignificant thing can produce disastrous effects. Everybody knows that. Didn't Franklin say:

'A little neglect may breed mischief; for want of a nail the shoe was lost; for want of a shoe the horse was lost; and for want of a horse the rider was lost.'"

That man was really a trifle-hunter, constantly collect-

ing material for his own justification. He had not the least idea where the trifles which irritated him so much in his wife were to be placed in his psychic economy. Being conscious, however, that his resultant irritation was out of proportion—"such a small thing does not warrant so great a fury"—he found a new self-justification by magnifying generally the importance of details. This ingenious device did not help him: his wife did not accept his theory.

*"Talk it out."*

This is an obvious idea, endlessly practiced, with completely negative results. Why is that remedy a false one?

It does not work because as I have pointed out, it is not the trifle itself that causes the trouble; the trifle is only a hitching-post for a deeper unconscious conflict.

There is, of course, no objection to airing all the irritating trifles. In periods of good feeling the practice of the irritating trifle may be discontinued, only to be repeated "without thinking" when the domestic atmosphere clouds up. However, should the trifle be definitely given up, another detail is seized upon by the mate and elevated to the role of inner tormentor. There is no shortage of trifles.

The simple fact is that the irritation of trifles is unavoidable even in the best of marriages. The crux of the matter is how much inner importance one attaches to the irritant.

A majority of married couples not only "cultivate" these irritating details, but stubbornly catalogue them in an inner file, bringing them out for use whenever they are angry. They go so far that they come to expect and

look for the irritating habit even before the "crime" is committed.

The extent of irritation over trifles is identical with the amount of neuroticism accumulated in a specific individual, and mobilized in marriage. As I have already pointed out, everybody has a good-sized package of neurotic tendencies, and consequently feels a corresponding amount of irritation over trifles.

The irritation of trifles can be eliminated basically only by analyzing the unconscious causes. Since the number of people in analysis is negligible, because of lack of knowledge, insight, money, time, and trained physicians, different ways of coping with the universal difficulty are sought. Even psychoanalysis is employed with relative infrequency for the purpose of eliminating "these minor irritants," although an increasing number of patients enter treatment with the complaint "I'm constantly irritated with my husband (wife)."

In the meantime people simply suffer and inwardly feel martyred. A cynical patient, having become acquainted with the role psychic masochism plays in the psychic economy, suggested ironically that those "irritating trifles" have a very salutary function as *harmless* depositories of self-torture. That may be so, but from the viewpoint of pursuit of happiness, they are a bitter pill to swallow.

The only answer possible at the moment is this: Your irritation over trifles pertains to you and not to your mate, whom you have chosen because of your inner conflict. It is the unavoidable result of your specific undigested inner fight. Don't act like a martyr and don't consider yourself a pitiable unique exception; understand

that the real cause of your irritation is not the rationalization you have fabricated. If the amount and frequency of your irritation become subjectively unbearable, consult the nearest psychiatrist before running to the nearest lawyer clamoring for divorce. Only the psychiatrist can help you to find out and eventually eliminate the "idiotic" trifle which has become the crystallization point of your inner conflict.

Said a patient: "The special trifles—the marital trifles—can break a marriage, or, at least, make hell out of it." The man was on the right track. The special trifles are really not trifles—in a nutshell you have the whole marital misery condensed. A deadly, slow-working bacillus doesn't weigh much, either.

In harmless cases, the irritation is counteracted by the underlying affection and camaraderie of the couple. Love makes blind only at the highpoint of love-intoxication. But even in the more moderate climate of the later years of marriage, affection is maintained to a certain degree. In good marriages—and it cannot be stressed strongly enough that these exist in great numbers—the necessary mutual adjustments to each other's peculiarities are not so difficult, because it is love that holds the couple together. Love is still the best antidote for the irritation caused by trifles. Understanding, a tolerant or amused smile is visible where, under less favorable conditions, a "blood vessel is about to burst." This does not mean that even in an "ideal marriage" transitory irritations and frictions are absent. There are no people without some admixtures of neurotic tendencies, and exactly these "admixtures" always make some trouble.

The everyday experience of couples in love occasionally

gives rise to some misunderstanding of "who's who" in the personality. In a good marriage, each of the partners can eliminate irritating traits that the other objects to. The sequence of events is seemingly this: the husband is irritated, let us say, by his wife's "messiness": she throws her clothes on the floor or chair instead of hanging them in the closet. He points out—very logically—that messy and wrinkled dresses are not exactly a pretty sight. After overcoming a few obstacles, he "convinces" her—she accepts the logic of his reasoning and acquires as a "conditioned reflex" some degree of neatness. What really happens is that because of love for her husband, an inner identification with his demand for neatness takes place. Since that part of the person is not accessible to conscious introspection, "logic" scores a success. Both partners pride themselves on how "two reasonable people can solve their conflicts without friction."

Do not believe that you can get rid of your conflict—and it cannot be repeated frequently enough that it is your own conflict which causes the trouble—by exchanging your husband or wife. Your conflict will follow you faithfully into the next marriage.\*

If it were possible to conduct human affairs after Mrs. Page's principle,† to which she herself was incapable of adhering, "Dispense with trifles," this world would be a

\* See the writer's books: *Unhappy Marriage and Divorce*, New York, International Universities Press, 1946, and *Divorce Won't Help*, New York, Harper and Brothers, 1948.

† *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, II, I.

Mrs. Page: What's the matter, woman?

Mrs. Ford: O woman, if it were not for one trifling respect, I could come to much honour!

Mrs. Page: Hang the trifle, woman! Take the honour. What is it? Dispense with trifles; what is it?

less emotional place to live in. However, the human being at present is psychologically poorly equipped for an existence purified of emotionalism. Homo sapiens rests discontented on the Procrustean bed of emotional trifles "which no poet sings."

**P A R T   I I**

**M E N T A L**

**C R U E L T Y**





## CHAPTER FOUR

### Marital Duet: "You Are Cruel"— "You Are Selfish"

THE two principal accusations leveled with amazing regularity at their spouses by angry husbands and wives are:

"SHE is at bottom cruel and mean—in short, a bitch."

"HE is at bottom selfish and conceited—in short, an intolerable fool."

What are the sober facts?

The two pillars of "mental cruelty," man's "conceited selfishness" and woman's "cruelty," are incomprehensible without a microscopic scrutiny of the current naive concepts of the "he-man" and the "passive woman."

The concept of masculinity is taken for granted in our culture. A "real" man, in the popular belief, combines activity, virility, determination; in short, he is an adventurous though stable, conquering though faithful, hero. Superior in life, love, vocation, he is frightened by nothing; where other mortals despair, he asks in good humor, "What do we do next?"

Answering the question, "Are you a man or a mouse?" the he-man decides most emphatically against the mouse. The word "fear" is not in his vocabulary. And the other

shameful term, "impossible," is not to be found even in the darkest corner of his mind.

He-man's relation to work is characterized by speed, efficiency, the willingness to take chances against overwhelming odds, and the ability to come out on top with the greatest of regularity.

He-man's approach to women? Protective, superior, and gentlemanly. He pays homage to the "weaker sex." He can afford to be magnanimous: he is a kind though supercilious giant looking at a dwarf.

He-man is made out of unbreakable material: firm and elastic, steel-hard and bending. At worst, he rolls with the punches.

He-man doesn't take "no" for an answer: he gets his way, anyway. The sheer force of his reputation opens all doors to him.

He-man is the stuff heroes in fairy tales are made of. He reminds one of the cartoon "Superman."

If we ask seriously where this fantastic picture comes from, forgetting what is conveniently taken for granted, we are confronted with a fantasy and a myth.

The fantasy, however, has full reality-value for all concerned. The heavy burden of being a "he-man" is augmented by other people's expectation of witnessing the performance—and those expectations are pitched high.

The concept of the he-man conveniently ignores the fact that the hero, once upon a baby-time, was a parasitic infant completely dependent on a woman, usually the mother. This first psychic connection must leave its marks.

The question has never been asked how the transition between the parasitic baby and the family provider of

some twenty years later is made.\* It is simply taken for granted that the adult male assumes family duties.

The psychologic mechanism making this strange transition possible is a phenomenon called "unconscious repetition compulsion." There exists, as Freud pointed out in other connections, a general tendency in the human being to repeat actively what he has experienced passively. The purpose is to eradicate the lesion in self-esteem (narcissism) acquired by being forced into the passive situation.

Examples of this tendency are evident even in children's games, which provided Freud with his classical example. The little girl, forced passively at the dentist's office to open her mouth, against her own furious protests, after returning home played dentist with a younger sibling, now taking the active role. By this reversal the mortified self-esteem is "restored."

This mechanism, in my opinion, plays the decisive part in achieving normalcy in man. It explains how the parasitic baby later changes into the active family provider: man, who in babyhood and childhood has been the passive recipient, his mother being the chief provider, in adult life repeats actively the role of provider.

Equally important is the function of identification: the man, providing for his wife and family, identifies unconsciously with the mother of his early childhood, giving as she gave, providing as she provided.

Why should he do this? Whence the impulse to identify with the mother? The answer is that in identifying with somebody, one in effect replaces and cancels out the

\* See the chapter "The Myth of the Superior Male" in *Divorce Won't Help*.

person with whom one identifies. Psychologically, *real* mother and *image* of the mother, as mirrored in the child's unconscious fantasies, are by no means identical. Hence no offense to "real" mothers is meant.

But why should the man wish to "obliterate" the mother who has done so much for him? Here we reach the heart of the entire issue.

I believe that the answer is that the man unconsciously resents the fact that once he was completely dependent upon a woman. He was born of a woman, fed, reared, and educated by a woman, and utterly dependent on her from the very beginning of his life. This fact is a severe blow to man's repressed infantile delusions of grandeur and to the high pretensions of his ego. Consequently anything that reminds him of his early helplessness and dependence is naturally unwelcome. One could say that man is allergic to his early passivity.

Every baby, as we saw earlier, has an insatiable megalomania, and naively assumes that he is dependent upon nothing. His mother is the first person, as a rule, upon whom it is plain to him that he is dependent; a single denial or even a delay in the fulfillment of some wish is vastly disturbing and disillusioning to his ego, for it demonstrates clearly his dependence upon others, in this case his mother. And unconsciously he never forgives her for it. Far from being grateful to her for her incessant attentions to him, he takes them for granted and, when frustrated, is angry and furious with her.

By identifying with the mother who has affronted him—in effect, denying her very existence and thus the blow to his early megalomania, he not only restores his self-esteem but becomes, by that very identification, the pro-

vider of the family. "I am not a helpless parasite, dependent on others; I am the provider, and others are dependent on me" is the unconscious reasoning behind this face-saving device.

The transition from parasitic baby to provident family-man does not, however, occur without a hitch. There are unconscious remnants of resentment even in the most normal man. How else is one to account for the "sucked-out" feeling of which he often complains and for which he blames his wife, seeing her as a useless parasite? And how else is one to explain the almost universal deprecatory attitude of husbands toward housework, particularly those aspects of it which are directly connected with food (supplying nutrition)? The old wound of dependence on the providing mother (providing food especially) is still there, and man must deny its existence in order to save his ego. This he does by disparaging the importance of woman's work in the home and kitchen. The attitude is purely a defensive one.

Thus man fights a lifelong battle with his inner passivity, building up the face-saving mirage of the he-man. His inner passivity also accounts for the fact that man considers woman weak and frail and in need of constant protection. He is unconsciously projecting upon woman his own past.

He-man is an amazing creature: first, he borrows strength from identification with the "strong woman" (mother) and uses her borrowed strength as a crutch. Later, he uses that very same crutch as a psychological stick with which to beat up "weak woman."

In the ideal situation, leading in its end effects to normalcy, man unconsciously identifies with the image

of the giving mother. Then, and then only, he gives—love, tenderness, sex, money. But when man identifies with the image of the refusing mother, the results are: selfishness, emotional coldness, lack of tenderness, refusal of sex and money. The man feels “drained” and “taken advantage of.” The result is, as formulated in *Divorce Won't Help*, that that type of man holds on to the purse strings to disguise the fact that he is holding on to his wife's (mother's) apron strings.

One can adduce another mitigating circumstance. In the oedipal phase of his development the boy once more borrows strength—this time from the “strong” father with whom he now identifies. He is a wholesale borrower. With this strength he demotes the all-powerful mother to the position of a passive being. In relatively normal cases, this identification with the “strong” mother (later father), and the deposition of aggression enable the man to assume family duties, and like it.

Every human being has a different degree of activity (aggression) in his biologic make-up. Even he-man, who strives so hard to disguise his passivity, has it. The fact that he uses borrowed strength shows that there is some aggression in his biologic bank-account to draw upon.

The borrowed strength substructure explains why the neurotic male feels pushed around when his wife does not show “all-out passivity.” Her active attitude shakes his house of cards and unconsciously reminds him of his unsettled account with passivity. For this he compensates with ridiculous conceit and pseudo-aggression. He prefers even the reproach: “You are selfish and self-centered,” to the gnawing reproach of passivity—at least it attests his aggression. He inwardly prefers to take the blame for

the lesser crime. Neurotic he-men are losers in the great "battle of passivity" which rages from the cradle to the grave in every male.\*

Let us take the evidence of a few witnesses.

Mr. J., a man of forty, entered analysis to "straighten out" his marriage.

"What's wrong with your marriage?"

"I'm potent with other women but sexually uninterested in my wife."

"How long have you been married?"

"Twelve years."

"For how long have you been 'uninterested' in her?"

"Approximately ten years."

"What happened?"

"Nothing that I can put my finger on. My interest just waned."

"Why did you marry?"

"Because of love."

"How did your feeling toward your wife change?"

"I'm irritated. I don't dislike her actually, I'm just irritated."

"Why?"

"I don't know."

"Do you love somebody else?"

"No. Just transitory affairs."

"Why did you desire to 'straighten out' your marriage?"

"I consider the present state of affairs senseless, and I don't want a divorce because of external factors."

\* This does not exclude a good-sized aggression in professional endeavors. He-man's passivity and compensatory superciliousness frequently center about his relation to women. This is his Achilles' heel.

"What does your wife say to your sexual retirement?"

"First she reproached me mildly. During the last years, she has seemed resigned."

"Do you have any conscious guilt in depriving your wife of a normal life?"

"In a mild way, yes. She is restless, and works her head off in charitable organizations, and takes courses at the university."

"How do you handle money matters in your marriage?"

"No troubles there. I give freely, perhaps to appease my guilty conscience."

"And she?"

"She is rather pleased and says that I have changed for the better. In the beginning of our marriage we did have quarrels about money."

"Why?"

"I had the feeling that she spent my money too freely. She seemed not to understand that every dollar meant hard work."

"Did you reproach her?"

"I did."

"And she?"

"Her attitude irritated me. She acted like a spanked child, convinced she was being unjustly scolded."

"At present you give freely and without feeling that your wife squanders your hard-earned money?"

"Correct. As I told you, I suspect that I'm buying off my guilt with money."

"If I understand you correctly, as long as you gave sex, you were stingy with money. Now, the reverse is the case."

"Your description shocks me, but in a way it is right.



Please understand, though, that I have never been really stingy. I just resented her way of spending money."

Mr. K., an artist inhibited in his productivity, complained repeatedly that "women take me for a sucker."

"What do you mean specifically?"

"I refer to their idiotic attitude of expecting the man to pay for them in a restaurant, theater, movie. Why isn't 'going Dutch' the accepted thing?"

"Do you object because of the expenses involved or on principle?"

"On principle. You know my financial situation—it doesn't really matter whether or not I spend a few dollars."

"Isn't it strange that though you are in the happy position of being economically independent, you make much ado about a few dollars?"

"A matter of principle is involved, if you don't mind. I don't bemoan the loss of the few dollars; it just makes me furious to have women always trying to drain me of money."

"Do you object to gallantry in general?"

"As long as money isn't involved, no."

"Why does money make all this difference?"

"I don't know. I can only describe my reaction. In such situations I just get furious. The nearest I can come to a reason for my fury is that my sense of justice is offended."

"Do you feel drained, too, when you have sex relations with these same women?"

"No. I want to have sex with them. Only, if a woman is too demanding sexually, I have the same feeling."

"Is this a general attitude of yours toward women? Why do you consider them draining monsters?"

"I would rather say: draining children."

"Why draining in the first place?"

"Well, they are."

"Why?"

"Well, it's your job to figure that out. I'm paying you for that . . ."

Mr. L., who had supported his family for fifteen years, complained, among other things, that his wife was "a parasite."

"Meaning?"

"A parasite. Period."

"A parasite. Question-mark."

"I don't see the humor of the situation. Did you see *The Moon and Sixpence*?"

"You mean Lewin's dramatization of Somerset Maugham's story?"

"Yes. There you have a man who after long marital slavery decides to break away."

"You fail to mention that the hero considers himself a talented artist."

"Fiddlesticks. That's just an excuse. He is simply fed up with supporting his wife and children. What amused me most is that the family sends an emissary to him and the emissary can't find one sound argument why the husband should support the parasitic family. All the men in the audience just roared with laughter."

"Those same husbands who roared with joy later went home and continued to support their respective families."

"Which only proves that men are subjugated by parasitic women."

He-man starts his fight with the world with the disadvantage of being a myth. As we have seen, the whole conception is the result of man's desperate attempt to negate his inner passivity.

Unfortunately, a myth has to be constantly fed. And that upkeep takes more inner energy than poor he-man can reasonably afford. If you overspend in buying a house, the running expenses will wear you down. An additional burden is added to a load that was too heavy to start with. Inwardly he-man is constantly on the watch for a woman's tilted brow, an amused and mocking smile, a disparaging gesture—though she lets him act the role of the conqueror. His eternal inner question is: Will she see through my pose?

Don't underestimate he-man's plight: it is not easy to have to impress the person who was a powerful adult when you crawled on hands and knees, the person who dressed you and undressed you, and taught you to walk and talk and feed yourself.

Of course, one could object that the adult doesn't try to impress the same persons who, once upon a baby-time witnessed his humble and rather passive beginnings. That is only descriptively correct. Psychologically, the species woman is an entity, especially for the inner conscience. That punitive department of the unconscious part of the personality constantly holds up the mirror of the baby to the he-man. He-man is in the psychic situation of an impostor, constantly fearful lest his real identity be revealed. As a result, a good part of his psychic energy

is unproductively spent in building defenses against this possibility.

The question arises of why women accept all this nonsense from the baby in adult guise. The answer is complex, but as far as I can see, it has the following constituents.

1. *Woman is not fooled by the baby in man's clothes.* Inwardly, they see through him; and instinctively, they act accordingly, and appease and flatter. The results of this intuitive marital diplomacy are well expressed by Oliver Wendell Holmes: "Man has his will, but woman has her way."

2. *Woman's own psychic masochism pushes her into the passive situation, also.* Every human being is endowed with a good portion of psychic masochism. Women are no exception.

3. *The propelling force of the myth.* In our culture a girl is confronted with the fact that boys have greater "rights" and "freedom." How often does the girl not hear "Only boys can do that." The same attitude colors the nursery, too. The girl comes to the conclusion that the magic of being a boy is somehow connected with his sex organs. The result is an intense envy—which in many women contributes to hysterical frigidity.

4. *Education of children.* The moment a couple decides to have children, the woman enters the "distinguished profession of being a mother," as a writer expressed it. This in itself is a full-time job. Once more the man has no appreciation of this. Intense jealousy is hidden behind that ridiculous attitude: only an immature man is jealous of his own child. A normal man identifies

with the child's problems, though consciously he frequently feels above the situation.

Motherhood is, indeed, a distinguished profession. What it needs is a good press agent. With astonishing regularity I have found in analyses of men that they consider their wives in the role of a mother—a parasite. True, they don't dare admit it, but they firmly believe it.

5. *Economic advantages.* To be supported has obvious advantages. On the other hand, he-man often misuses his earning capacity, does not appreciate his wife's work ("She plays with the children, cooks a few meals, and calls that work"), and builds up the fantasy of the parasite for whom he works himself to an early death.

In recent decades since women have begun to earn their own living the picture has changed somewhat. However, only too often women are supposed to earn their living and be housewives at the same time. A new burden is added, of which he-man has no appreciation.

6. *Remnants of infantile wishes.* The experience of being passively cared for—the first experience in life—leaves imprints on both sexes. But where he-man fights a lifelong battle against it, woman can allow herself to indulge in it to a great extent. This is a factor in her greater strength, for it means she does not need to use a large part of her psychic energy building up inner defenses—at least on that score.

He-man enters marriage with a heavier load than is good for him. He marries fundamentally because the inner reproach that he is a passive baby has to be silenced. The best alibi is marriage: he supports the wife and, later, the children. He-man is vindicated.

Part and parcel of this tragi-comedy of hidden passivity, is man's reproach that women are "cruel."

From time immemorial woman has had a dual reputation: she has been both the good mother and the seductress, the witch. Usually an attempt is made to solve the contradiction by pointing out that when women are cruel, they are crueller than men:

Oh woman, woman, when ill thy mind is bent,  
All hell contains no fouler fiend.

(Homer's *Odyssey*, Broome Translation, XI, 1, 531)

To bolster this theory mythology is adduced, disguised as history:

What mighty ills have not been done by women!  
Who was't betrayed the Capitol?—A woman;  
Who lost Marc Antony the world?—A woman;  
Who was the cause of a long ten years' war,  
And laid at last old Troy in ashes?—Woman;  
Destructive, damnable, deceitful woman!

(Thomas Otway, "The Orphan," III, 1)

The modern version of this "historically" based bad reputation is the complaint of men that women are irrational, emotional, dishonest, and hysterical. No medical term is more overworked and misused than "hysteria." Whenever a man is reproached for some misdeed about which he feels guilty, he retorts that his wife is hysterical. Nowhere is Byron's statement, "with just enough learning to misquote," more applicable than to the use of this term by irate husbands. When they are asked what they mean, their definitions are ridiculous.

Fairy tales are not more benevolent toward women than are malicious men. Take, for example, Grimm's "Hansel and Gretel," a conception which finds its coun-

terpart in the myths of all countries and cultures. The cannibalistic witch who devours children after having enticed them with delicious candy—where on earth is the paradigmatic experience behind this conception? The femme fatale, the seductress, the Circe—how women have earned such a vicious reputation has never been satisfactorily answered. The “petroleuse” and blood-thirsty woman much in evidence in all revolutionary periods is no proof of the greater cruelty of women in general, for they are exceptions: women as a rule have not participated in “making history.” True, the lady “obergruppenfuehrer” in a notorious Nazi concentration camp, who according to newspaper reports killed innocent victims who happened to be tattooed in order to make lamp shades for herself and her friends, is not an attractive example of womanhood. However, in a reckoning of man’s inhumanity to man, women are relatively innocent—perhaps, as misogynists contend, only because of lack of opportunity.

In general, one can say that women’s neurotic cruelty is restricted to intolerance, malice, and gossip. Women are more inclined to kill with their tongue than with poison or a gun.

What is the source of the reputation women have acquired? It is, as psychoanalysis has proven, a complicated psychic phenomenon, not understandable unless one is familiar with the fact of *projection*—the unconscious attribution of one’s own feeling to another person. For example, when a neurotic accuses his wife of wanting to leave him, whereas in reality he wants inwardly to leave her, though he doesn’t realize it consciously, the mechanism of projection is at work.

Clearly, projection is not used to ward off consciously accepted feelings of which one is proud. The typical material for projection is the disagreeable, unacceptable feeling which is counteracted by a strong inner sense of guilt. It is this fact that accounts for the existence of the fantasy of the "cruel" woman. The aggressive tendencies, which every child harbors toward his mother, and which show up primarily as biting—the only halfway powerful weapon at the baby's disposal—are forbidden and later become guilt-laden. The wish to bite and devour is later projected upon the mother: She is a devouring monster. (This deduction was first made by the English school of analysis.)

Of course, man's projection of his own cruelty upon women is not the only reason that women have acquired a reputation for heartlessness. Another factor is the fantastic "castration fear." The male child is always afraid for his genital organs. Since the girl's anatomy is different (in his opinion, "castrated"), the boy in his ignorance of biological facts assumes that she will out of envy snatch away his organ. We find in the dreams of neurotics, and even in those of normal people, a large number of such unconscious fears. Interestingly enough, even the harmless act of killing and dressing of fowl is taken by the child as proof that the mother is "cruel": "If she is capable of *that* she is capable of castrating me, too." These fears are sometimes increased by senseless parental threats in connection with the unavoidable masturbation of childhood. To cover his unconscious fear of woman, man disguises his fantasy by making her "weak," unimportant, or at best a sexual toy.

To complicate matters, various reality factors



strengthen this unconscious fantasy which, as we have seen, stems from entirely different sources. For instance, men frequently produce the argument, in proof of woman's "refusing and cruel nature," that woman can refuse sex. Add to this the fact that neurotic and half-neurotic women frequently show a good-sized anger with their neurotic baby-husbands, rebelling at the discrepancy between their lordly behavior and their easily perceived passivity; as well as the fact that woman's own masochism makes a "sadist" out of even a weak man (since a protagonist is needed), and it is understandable why the pitiful confusion concerning woman's nature continues *ad infinitum*.

Understanding he-man's story, one is torn with pity for the poor human being who lives above his emotional means. He reminds one of the little eighteenth-century potentate who always wore overtight collars on festive occasions, impeding his blood circulation and giving his face a bright red martial color.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### "My Husband (Wife) Tortures Me By..."

**M**ENTAL cruelty" is a convenient term made out of durable rubber: stretch it as you like, it still snaps back and can be used indefinitely in marital conflicts.

This does not imply that the complaints it covers are not often very real. What is ignored is the factor of reciprocity: two neurotics cooperate *unconsciously* to achieve the same aim and meet each other halfway. It cannot be reiterated often enough that there are no innocent victims in the marital battle. The "injustice" a wife complains about occurs only because she cooperated. That inner cooperation consists first of her unconscious choice of a disappointing husband; and second, of her unconscious provocation of the attitude that "tortures" her. If one takes these complaints at face value, one comes to erroneous conclusions. To commiserate in such cases is senseless: by so doing one simply serves as the accomplice of the neurotic woman's inner defense, for her tearful story is nothing but an unconscious alibi, convincingly presented for the purpose of exculpating herself. The moment one takes sides, the shaky alibi of the culprit is sustained. "I don't want

to be treated that way; I'm not masochistic. My innocence is even attested by others"—that is the unconscious formula.

A complete catalogue of the accusations that fall under the heading of mental cruelty is impossible. A few typical examples will have to suffice.

Every complaint of mental cruelty begins with some such phrase as: "My husband (wife) tortures me by . . ." Let us go on from there:

*"My husband tortures me by being self-centered and inconsiderate."*

Under normal conditions a stream of mutual identifications flows between husband and wife. In neurotic marriages, there is a heavy concentration of neurotic tendencies in the stream, and husband and wife inevitably accuse each other of egotism. This is especially true of a couple who, without the slightest awareness of doing so, play the unconscious game of "injustice collecting."

Here is the description of a weekend, given by a neurotic husband:

"The whole weekend was a mess. It started on Saturday morning with my wife refusing sex, promising it for the evening. I grumbled and made breakfast. In the kitchen I discovered that the icebox was practically empty. She is well aware of the fact that I want just certain foods on Saturdays, but she forgot to buy them. More anger and disappointment. She was still asleep, so I couldn't even give vent to my fury. I started to work on a desk I'm building for her—cabinet work is a hobby of mine. Instead of being appreciative, she reproached me for being 'grumpy' and selfish. She'd already for-

gotten that she had spoiled my breakfast. Her excuse was that she wanted to go shopping with me. I work hard five days a week and don't even have a peaceful weekend!

"Then she wanted me to be the model for a vest she is knitting for her father; of course she hadn't bothered to ask her mother for the measurements. When I pointed out that my hands were dirty and my glasses dusty, she started to complain about my selfishness. I advised her to write for measurements, but her only answer was a complaint about my 'preachy' tone of voice. I asked what we were going to eat for lunch, since there was almost nothing in the icebox, and she got angry and said that I was always complaining and that potato pancakes would do. She first refused, then consented to prepare them, but behaved like a child of five, constantly asking questions about how to do it, though she is a good cook. Her excuse was that I was so 'fussy.' After lunch I took a nap, having agreed to go shopping with her afterwards. In the meantime, her guilty conscience sent her off to do the shopping alone. She came back just as I woke up. When I showed I was surprised that she'd gone without me, she complained that I was always nagging. I only pointed out her inconsistency in not sticking to plans previously agreed upon. She was irritable, and even a harmless tender attempt at petting on my part was interpreted as 'annoying her.' We planned to go to the movies; it rained hard, so we stayed home. It was boring as hell. In the evening she fell asleep on the couch. I expected the promised sex. She, however, was asleep the moment she went to bed. I was furious with her selfishness."

Both mates gave each other an object-lesson in injustice collecting. First, he asked for sex in the morning, though he knew that she abhorred sex in the daylight. As a result she felt he was making selfish demands on her. He, forgetting her self-made rules, felt abused and offended by her selfishness. She had done some preparatory work in the business of provocation the preceding day by not shopping; hence, the icebox was empty. So, he felt offended by her lack of consideration and selfishness. He started to work on her desk with the feeling that he was sacrificing himself while she was selfish. Forgetting her own acts of provocation, she saw only his bad humor and his selfishness in not being interested in her present for her father, and complained about his preachy tone.

The next injustice appeared around lunchtime: she did not prepare anything, having planned to shop in the morning when he could help her with carrying packages perhaps. She did not appreciate the fact that he was working on her desk, and felt unjustly treated, especially because he wanted to take a nap. To prove how selfish he was, she went shopping alone and again felt unjustly treated by not being helped. Instead of appreciating that sacrifice, he reproached her with inconsistency, which infuriated her. The movie was postponed, seemingly because of bad weather, in fact only to prove mutually how little they had to say to each other. Double injustice-collecting went on unabated. In the evening she was sleepy—could she help it after such a long day?—with the result that he felt cheated out of sex. Both concluded the day by complaining about the other's selfishness, oblivious of the fact that they had each provoked

in succession, and played into each other's hands to achieve the goal of innocent victim. The only gain was psychic masochism, consciously unperceivable. The conscious reverberation was the complaint of "exaggerated selfishness bordering on mental cruelty."

*"My husband tortures me by his indifference."*

There are women who are completely intolerant of any diversion of their husbands' interest. His preoccupation with financial worries or concern about his job, or enjoyment of a hobby they regard as "lack of interest" in them and personal malice. The infantile "child-woman" excels in this attitude.

In more normal cases, such unreasonable demands are not made. Still, intellectual understanding does not always match the affective reaction.

"Psychology," claimed Dostoevski, "is a stick with two ends." The other end in this case is the husband's story. He, too, has a tale to tell.

A simple juxtaposition of a neurotic couple's complaints about each other's indifference reveals both as typical "injustice-collectors":

She: "My husband is a block of ice. He doesn't show the slightest interest in my emotional life; he treats me like a bothersome servant. For me to do all the dirty housework is O.K. with him; but for him to show any decent feelings of interest—oh no, that's expecting too much! If I ask him about his business, he acts bored; if I tell him about my day, he is bored and mute too. The result is that two strangers are linked together by a relation called marriage, which in our case has lost all meaning."

He: "My wife doesn't show the slightest interest in my troubles. She complains about my indifference. What really happens? I used to tell her of my struggles and financial fights in the office, but invariably she took the part of my opponents, reproaching me for their meanness. The result is that I don't expose myself to that any more at home. What else has she to offer? Servant troubles and family squabbles. I come home dead tired, and for her the day has just started . . ."

Both these people were subsequently analyzed. In each case the same psychic substructure was found: they unconsciously acted with each other the indifferent father-child and mother-child relationship, respectively. Each had chosen the other not despite but because of his ability to act the "bored adult."

*"My husband tortures me by his nagging and irrational scenes."*

"Every time I object to my wife's behavior, she pulls the 'Are you nagging at me again?' line. Am I to condone everything? Does a husband have only one right—to keep his mouth shut?"

"My wife," complained another patient indignantly, "is a bargain hunter. Her reasons for buying are ridiculous: she couldn't resist because of the low price, or she didn't need the thing but could use it some day. When I dare ask her, 'Do you need that junk?' she gets excited and accuses me of nagging. How can you live in peace with that philosophy?"

Both ladies were asked whether "nagging" was a description of their husband's tone or whether the complaints were unjustified. Were they themselves as inno-

cent as they claimed? With righteous indignation both wives denied that they unconsciously provoked the situation. They considered themselves innocent victims. Analysis proved exactly the opposite: they provoked mercilessly.

What is the unconscious reason for this strange game? There exists a psychic mechanism called "negative magic gesture." Never mind the complicated term, it denotes something important: it is the unconscious dramatization of how the individual had not wanted to be treated in infancy. The unconscious game needs two players—the innocent victim and the torturing adult. This adult is not seen as he really was, but as a caricature of himself. Without the slightest notion of what he is doing, many a married person acts a caricature of the stern educator of his childhood reducing his mate to victimized child.

Let us take as an example the husband protesting about the "junk" his wife accumulated in her bargain-hunting expeditions. The husband acted not only in self-defense; he was really disagreeable and rather vicious in his attacks. Unconsciously he acted his own stern father reproaching the child for buying candy. Intrapsychically he was also the scolded child, hence enjoyed a double pleasure: pseudo-aggression (from caricaturing his stern father) and masochistic submission (from being victimized).

On the other hand, his wife knew only too well what to expect when she proudly displayed the "junk" she had purchased. She did it time and time again, simply to cash in on her own masochistic pleasure.

*"My husband tortures me by his stinginess."*

As we have already seen, every man, burdened with



partly undigested infantile conflicts, harbors the feeling that women are parasites. One of the results of this undigested babyishness is a pseudo-aggression expressed by the refusal of money. It is not real aggression but a sham aggression unconsciously designed to bring on new difficulties. The game of refusing is at bottom self-damaging and not genuinely aggressive and the best proof of this is its effect: Every marital refusal boomerangs against the refuser. Women don't take refusal, especially of money, lying down; they fight back and make their husbands' lives miserable. In this roundabout way the husband once more enjoys psychic masochism.

What husbands and wives don't understand, is that the husband owes a constant apology to his severe inner conscience, which reproaches him because of the masochistic enjoyment his unhappy marriage gives him. To prove that he is not masochistic but aggressive, he "refuses" only to cash in on new "injustices."

Wives do not understand the unconscious background: they see only the superficial stinginess. This pathologic attitude is sometimes grotesquely manifested. Here are a few complaints of infuriated wives:

1. "Pinching pennies is my husband's second nature. He is a miser and steals even from our boy of four. The child has a 'piggy-bank': the boy caught his father stealing a dime. My wonderful husband pretended first that he wanted to exchange the dime for ten pennies 'to make him feel richer.' The smart boy wasn't fooled, and instead cried that his father was taking his treasure. Thereupon my husband turned the tables and told him an 'educational story' about a father who asks his little boy to jump from the window of the ground-floor apartment.

The child is scared, but the father promises to catch him. The boy jumps and lands on his tail—and the father says: ‘Let this teach you a lesson; never trust anybody . . .’”

2. “Not only is my husband the personification of stinginess, but he puts queer ideas about money into our boys’ heads. For instance, he told the boys that until the postal authorities caught on to the trick it was possible to cheat the mail of the three-cent stamp on a letter. You addressed the letter to yourself and on the back put the address of the person you were writing to, pretending that he was the sender of the letter. The letter reached the addressee, because it was returned to him for lack of a stamp. My husband gave the example as proof that one should be smart—and allegedly as a joke. He didn’t recommend that technique of cheating the government, but spoke very admiringly of the trick. I am sure the children misunderstood him.”

3. “My husband makes me miserable with his queer attitude toward money. He talks about it constantly, and figures everything in dollars and cents. He gave me a birthday present, a check, saying he knew I would be proud to pay for my dentist’s bill myself . . . Every dress means a fight, every theater ticket a battle . . .”

Analysis of these three women proved that they were confronted in childhood with similar attitudes in their parents. Consciously, they wanted to escape; unconsciously they railroaded themselves into an identical situation of conflict.

*“My husband tortures me by his coldness and lack of tenderness.”*

If a woman marries one of the neurotics whose outward symptom is "lack of feeling," she has to bear the martyrdom of an emotional Siberia. The reasons for a neurotic's emotional coldness are complex and manifold. Typically one finds repression of all feelings because the only feeling that a neurotic is capable of is psychic masochism. By way of prevention, all feelings are discarded.

The wives of such men, justified though their complaints may be, never ask themselves why they married such an icicle in the first place. Their rationalizations vary: "I hoped to defrost my husband," "I believed that my love would change him," "I assumed he had simply been disappointed by unfortunate experiences and now would be different," and so on. All these statements cover neurotic repetitions of infantile fantasies, mostly, of course, of a masochistic nature.

*"My husband tortures me by his infidelity."*

Neurotic persons are in general poor material for marriage, which, if it is not to be reduced to an absurdity, excludes the concept of infidelity. The majority of neurotics are, however, at the mercy of the unconscious equation: sex=the forbidden. They never overcome their infantile misconceptions about sex. For the child, everything sexual is shrouded in mystery; even infantile masturbation is possible only when concealed or disguised. Quite naturally, then, the feeling that sex is forbidden becomes established. The more normal person solves this equation; the neurotic does not, and consequently never achieves a mature emotional attitude toward sex. Confronted with a situation—marriage—in which sex is no

longer tabooed, he has no use for it, but continues to crave for forbidden fruits.

The concept of "sex=the forbidden" drives the neurotic victim (both man and woman) into extra-marital affairs. Small wonder that infidelity has a high priority in marital disasters.

I saw a number of cases in which men and women who had divorced their respective wives and husbands to marry the object of their extra-marital attraction found themselves after a short time deeply dissatisfied: sex, which had tasted so good in the extra-marital affair, went stale when practiced with the same person in marriage. Since the victims did not know anything about the tragic formula, sex=the forbidden, they blamed the institution of marriage.

The concept of forbidden sex kills more marriages than any other aspect of neurotic infantilism. Married women especially are the victims of man's neurotic attitude toward sex, since the pressure of environment puts multiple divorces in a morally objectionable category. In general, therefore, women are more interested in maintaining shaky marriages than are men. Besides the outside moral pressure, there is an inner pressure: the need to consider the children. In the majority of cases children remain with the mother after divorce; not only is the economic standard lower, but the mother has to bear the brunt of her children's unhappiness, which frequently follows broken marriages.\*

Experience shows conclusively that wives put up with a good deal of masculine nonsense before they are ready to draw "Reno-consequences," as one woman put it.

\* See Chapter IX, Section 5 of *Divorce Won't Help*.

This attitude is frequently fostered by an intuitive understanding of the husband's infantilism: "The poor man just has to prove to himself that he is still young" is a characteristic statement.

Frequently the wife has no positive proof of her husband's infidelity and bases her suspicion on "little indicative signs," most typically on her husband's sexual indifference. With amazing regularity wives draw from infrequent or poorly executed sex relations the conviction that another woman is involved: "You don't love me any more." Their own frigidity and ignorance of unconscious factors make that conclusion inevitable.

The great majority of women are frigid in different degrees. Having often witnessed the husband's orgasm and having concluded, erroneously, that enjoyment of sex is one of the masculine prerogatives, these women are incapable of imagining that a man would renounce that pleasure voluntarily. Since the existence of neurosis is unknown to them, they immediately suspect their husbands of infidelity.

*"My husband tortures me by his jealousy."*

Jealousy is a complicated phenomenon. The child, if he is to become normal, gives up his oedipal wishes and accepts his parents as real and special friends, directing towards them a normal filial affection and camaraderie. The infantile triangle, however, leaves its mark: though the mother (in the case of the boy) and the father (in the case of the girl) are given up as "sexual" objects, the desire to eliminate the disturbing "third party" is perpetuated—even in normal marriage. Hence the third party in marriage activates the old rivalry of the nursery.

In other cases, as mentioned previously, jealousy sometimes denotes the projection of one's own desire to be unfaithful onto the innocent partner.

In still other cases, unconscious feminine tendencies in the man or equally repressed masculine tendencies in the woman are the troublemakers. The man is unconsciously used as "bridge to the woman" or the woman "as bridge to the man."\* In other words, in unconscious identification with an unfaithful wife, for instance, the husband's own repressed feminine tendencies are unconsciously revived and secondarily warded off with jealousy. It is a pseudo-jealousy, an alibi presented to disprove the superego's accusation that unconscious feminine wishes are being enjoyed.

The victim of jealousy is not so innocent either, and in many cases unconsciously provokes the vicious circle. Sometimes shrewd wives know this and even consciously act accordingly. As an example I shall cite Mrs. K., a woman of thirty-five, married for the third time at the time of her analysis:

"My husband is insanely jealous. He calls me up every half or quarter hour to chat with me, in reality to check on me. For a certain time he even employed a detective to follow me when I went out without him. The fact is that when I don't behave coquettishly, he is moody and . . . difficult, if you know what I mean. When, to play his silly game, I act coquettishly in a restaurant, he makes a violent scene, but later he is much nicer and loving. I've observed that crazy reaction many times."

This woman made an empirical discovery without un-

\* Besides these three types, described by Freud, there are other more complicated structures involved which it is not necessary to go into here.

derstanding what it meant. Her husband, a feminine weakling whom she had married because of his money, used her as "bridge to the man." His jealousy was of the banal defensive type, warding off his own femininity. Mrs. K. was quite right that after given his "jealousy-food" he was nicer than when starved of it.

The degree to which Mr. K.'s jealousy was defensive in structure is made plain by a fantastic incident which occurred two years before his marriage. His best friend at that time eloped with the divorcee who was later to become Mrs. K., and before the elopement informed Mr. K. (the future third husband) of his plans. "My God," objected Mr. K., "you can't marry her, she has the reputation of sleeping with anybody." The friend ignored the warning and married the woman, only to divorce her one year later. Forgetting his own warning, Mr. K. married her shortly afterwards.

Not in all cases are the facts so obvious. What this strange woman did cynically, many wives do without consciously knowing it. They foster their husbands' jealousy for neurotic reasons of their own; usually unconscious masochism is at work, covered up with various conscious rationalizations.

*"My husband tortures me by his lack of appreciation."*

A woman patient complained: "One evening we had an important man to dinner, and the guest paid me compliments about my cooking. At that moment I realized that for 365 meals a year for five years my husband hadn't paid me a single compliment. Imagine, 1,825 meals and not one compliment!"

Another woman had this to say: "Supervision of the

housework and the children, shopping and keeping the house in order—that's a full-time job. What do I get out of it? Not even one word of appreciation. That's mental cruelty, so help me!"

Another woman's lament: "My husband never talks appreciatively about me. He opens his mouth only to complain. When I wear a new dress he thinks about the check he wrote for it. He admitted that himself."

It would be to the point to ask whether the three ladies might not be classified as psychic masochists who had unconsciously chosen their unappreciative husbands.

*"My husband tortures me by his unreliability."*

Unreliability is a term which covers a multitude of sins in marriage, including the failure to keep promises, unpunctuality, financial instability and the deceptions of impostors.

Here are a few examples from complaining wives:

1. "A woman has the right to expect to be taken care of financially in marriage. What does my so-called husband do? He loses one position after another, because he rubs the presidents and vice-presidents of the different companies the wrong way. He just cannot afford to be 'independent,' as he calls it. The man has duties. He behaves as if I and the children just didn't exist . . ."

2. "My husband lives constantly on the edge of a financial volcano. I am not informed about the precise state of his affairs; but I have the impression that he stumbles from one crisis into another. He claims that he wants to provide security for the family. Security, my eye. Is constant fear of bankruptcy security?"

3. "To call my husband unreliable is a polite descrip-



tion. A promise is never fulfilled, an appointment never kept. When I reproach him, he tries his charm. That worked for some time; now I'm tired of it. Yesterday we wanted to go to the theater. He 'forgot' to buy the tickets, though he told me by phone that he did buy them. In the evening he acted like an innocent child, unfairly reproached . . ."

4. "I can't take my husband's statements at face value. After marriage I found out that he was divorced and had a child to support, besides having to pay regular sums to a so-called friend, who in my opinion is an extortionist. God knows what the crime is that gives him power over my husband . . ."

In analyzing these women, it soon became apparent that they were only consciously fooled by their husbands' "unreliability." One can always detect in the case history "little incidents" which, under normal conditions, would have warned or made suspicious even the most unsuspecting person. The warnings were overlooked, because these women unconsciously sought the disappointing situation. Of course, if one underestimates or is not aware of the existence of deep self-damaging tendencies, one comes to the erroneous conclusion that the wife is the innocent victim of an "impossible" husband.

The tragic results are demonstrated in this case: A lady presented herself with the following problem. "I married my husband four years ago. He was introduced to me at his cousin's home, as one of the partners in his business. He gave me the impression of being reliable and trustworthy, courted me with ardor, and seemed to be genuinely in love. We married and were happy. We never

had a dull moment; my husband is such a gay and happy person. One day I received a phone call from a woman I did not know, who asked to see me—"If you know what's good for your husband," she said. I saw her and she told me that she was a former girl-friend of his whom he had jilted. She informed me that my husband had spent four years in prison in some other state because of check-forgery, and was wanted by the police in still another state. What she really wanted from me wasn't clear. It seemed to me that she just wanted revenge. I confronted my husband with this information. I expected him to deny everything. To my surprise he admitted, laughingly, even more than the girl had claimed. I was shocked and instituted divorce proceedings on some harmless grounds. The tragedy is that I still love the man, and see him intimately occasionally. How could I have been fooled that way?"

It turned out that this was not the first time the lady had been taken in by an impostor. True, she had never married one before; her case confirmed the tragic fact that every neurosis increases with age.

Since women are often victims of impostors, a few characteristics of that disease may be mentioned here. In the first place, an impostor (1) is a social climber, and pretends to be on a higher social level than he really is. (2) He behaves charmingly, disarming others and inspiring their confidence by his firmness and self-assurance. Women in particular are charmed by the occasional feminine tendencies in these men. (3) He shows a kind of ironic humor, generally making fun of social institutions or prejudices, reducing them to absurdity for his own inner purposes. (4) He plays his role with utmost con-

fidence, as if he really were the person he pretends to be; his identification is that of an actor. Yet he is always aware that he is faking, and inwardly laughs at his disguise and the people who are taken in by it. (5) He is full of bombast and braggadocio, and when discovered cheating, maintains appearances until the last second. (6) He has a child's approach toward time. He has no thought of the future; his yardstick is today and today's hour only. (7) Though he appears to be an everlasting optimist, and indeed derives considerable conscious satisfaction from ridiculing his environment by his imposture, below this thin layer of ironic pleasure, deep depression is hidden. Sometimes his depression is visible on the surface when he thinks himself unobserved. (8) The impostor is unable to enjoy his self-created success for any length of time. He overdoes his triumph, seems to get bored with it, and unconsciously provokes his own downfall. (9) His attitude is one of cynicism and remorselessness. He tries to appear tough, especially when caught. "I married three wives? So what? They were in different places." "I cheated people out of money? So what? Suckers ask for it." (10) He repeats the same kind of crime, never one of a more serious nature, such as murder. The cheater remains a lifelong cheater; and in typical cases no further development in crime is observable. (11) He works only for short and temporary periods, and usually simply to gain the confidence of those whom he hopes to cheat. Consciously he feels superior to the poor slaves who accept work as the natural way of making a living. (12) He is incorrigible: neither prison nor good advice nor help of any other kind changes his behavior.

Impostors are psychopathic personalities laboring under an unconscious conflict referred to as the "mechanism of criminosis." They represent a specific case of failure to overcome early disappointment, and a case unique in its specific solution. The feeling of pre-oedipal disappointment in the mother and the absolute helplessness to take revenge on her for this disappointment force the criminal unconsciously to his act. His situation is that of a dwarf fighting a giant who refuses to take cognizance of his fight. The only way he can force the giant to recognize his intention is by using dynamite, so to speak, which also destroys himself.

That tendency to take revenge for disappointments in the pre-oedipal mother is projected upon society and is coupled with unconsciously self-intended punishment. Only unconscious anticipation and acceptance of punishment makes crime possible for the criminal, since it appeases his inner conscience. For the criminal not only has a conscience; he has a very severe one. He uses a specific device to "appease" it—severe self-imposed punishment.

The impostor is distinguished from other types of criminals by the fact that his narcissism is out of proportion, and that to restore the early lesion to his self-esteem, he is under the inner, unconscious necessity to prove his capacity to inspire love and admiration. This defense-mechanism accounts for his charming and disarming behavior. But, since that proof is only a narcissistic face-saving device, the masochistic "mechanism of criminosis" comes to the fore immediately afterward and leads to self-provoked, masochistic defeats. The notion often advanced that the narcissistic impostor wants nothing but

the admiration which was refused him in childhood can be disproved easily. Were it true, he would try to achieve such a situation and enjoy it. Nothing of the sort happens; after achieving love, he throws it away—in order to offend the mother-substitute. It is as if he were to say, "I wanted only to prove to you that I could get your love—but I don't care to have it."

The impostor's feeling of guilt pertains to his masochistic desire to reduce the mother to absurdity as a giving person and to unconsciously enjoy her refusal. The throwing away of love is in itself a *defense-mechanism of pseudo-aggression against this deep-seated masochistic wish* and not simply the result of his feeling of guilt.

The same defense-mechanism is visible also in the strange "sense of humor" which impels impostors to attack venerable institutions or time-honored prejudices of their environment.

The "lack of feelings" and "lack of conscience" attributed to the impostor are both futile attempts to escape psychic masochism. The wish for punishment finds its expression in a jail term or in the expectation of jail. The impostor's "humor" represents his frantic attempt to deny that he is narcissistically wounded and therefore depressed. The idea that the impostor has no conscience proves only that "every absurdity has a champion to defend it" (Goldsmith), and is the result of mistaking surface reverberations for the subterranean conflict they cover.

*"My husband tortures me with his peculiarities in sex."*

"Peculiarity in sex" includes a multitude of neurotic

manifestations, from impotence or premature ejaculation to practices regarded by women as perverted. "Peculiarity in sex," as the term is used by women, includes also sex at inopportune times, sex without tenderness, sex as a duty, constant sexual teasing, reduction of the woman to the role of a "prostitute without human values," talking indiscreetly in the presence of others, "dirty" jokes with marital innuendoes, and what not.

At various times, all the following complaints have been voiced in my office.

1. "My husband is impossible in sex. He doesn't understand that sex presupposes a mood of tenderness, love, companionship. Then and then only can I get something out of it. He, however, treats me like a prostitute: pinching, chasing, undressing goes on at a great rate. Finally, his appetite is greater than his hunger—in bed he is rather a washout."

2. "My husband is sexually uninterested. As far as he is concerned, that dish could be taken off the menu. I don't claim that I'm a Potiphar's wife, but his coldness offends me, and I ask myself whether or not I'm still a woman . . ."

3. "I always suspected what I now know for certain: men are sexually pigs. Normal sex has no attraction for my husband. He asks for all kinds of perversions, claiming that I'm a neurotic fool in refusing. My answer is, if you want *that*, go to a prostitute . . ."

4. "The worst part of this messy business of sex is that my husband has no respect for me as a lady. He asks me to use obscene words in bed. My God, that's manure and not civilized sex. If I don't comply, he is, believe it or not, impotent."

5. "My husband constantly reproaches me with frigidity. He just wants to be seduced and has no conception that civilized sex and 'jungle rape' are two different things. I don't want to quarrel with nature; I can only say, 'Phooey!'"

6. "My husband derives some vicarious pleasure from making all kinds of sexy allusions in the presence of our friends. It's as if I were the sexual property of his friends, too.\* It is distasteful to me. When I reproach him, he claims that I've no sense of humor. Queer humor!"

All these women were undoubtedly confronted with neurotic husbands whose sex functioned on an infantile level. Nevertheless, it did not occur to any of them to ask themselves why *they chose their neurotic husbands in the first place, or how they accounted for their own frigidity?*

Since potency depends on psychologic facts which, even in a normal man, may not be too favorable in a specific instance, every man has to repress at least some disagreeable experiences. Normally a certain self-assurance prevails. The more neurotic a man is, the more he feels that every sex act is a kind of test. Some men develop what one patient called "examination fright," which in such cases simply means potency disturbance.

Man's immaturity and inner insecurity account for a rather tragic fact: he spoils sex for the woman, provided

\* In some deeper neurosis these men go one step further and force their wives into an affair with a friend. This can be done on a conscious or unconscious level. Without woman's neurotic cooperation, the process is unintelligible. Not being conscious of their own masochism, these women claim that exactly that method is the only one to "interest" the husband.

she is not frigid. Woman in our culture needs tenderness as a preparatory act—that indefinable mood of “I love you.” Man’s overanxiousness, his fears, his haste, communicate to the woman exactly the opposite impression: “I want your *body*.” That repels her: sex without tenderness is unacceptable to her.

A special group are the so-called bisexuals. These are homosexual men with slight remnants of heterosexuality. When they are married to consciously unsuspecting women, the greatest tragedies result. Here is an example:

“I met my husband after a painful experience with a man whom I misjudged completely, and who turned out to be a selfish brute. The contrast between my friend and my future husband was remarkable: my husband was kind, considerate, eager to please. He was sexually rather reticent, and gave the impression of wanting to be coaxed. That was new to me, but I thought it was an act of some kind. I was also slightly suspicious of why he hadn’t married till he was thirty-eight. I was, however, rather proud of converting him to marriage. In any case, we married and for some time everything went well. One day—ten days ago, to be precise—I came home unexpectedly and found my husband in an embarrassing position with a young man. I was shocked and realized in a flash that he had married me to cover up his queerness. My husband confessed that he was sometimes attracted to younger men, and quoted strange statistics which allegedly prove that thirty-seven percent of all men at some time or another have homosexual affairs. In his opinion it is quite harmless. He claims that as long as a man is capable of sleeping with a woman everything is O.K. I don’t feel that way, and am repelled by the whole thing. I can’t get over the painful revelation that I’m



just a convenient alibi. My husband is furious when I mention that word. What is true about the whole thing?"

"Your husband is a sick man and needs treatment."

"But he is sometimes normal."

"That is possible. There are homosexuals with some remnants of heterosexuality which is even strengthened by the alibi-character of relations with women."

"What about his claim of bisexuality?"

"Nobody can dance at two different weddings at the same time. These so-called bisexuals are really homosexuals with an occasional heterosexual alibi."

"How can my husband be a fairy when he makes such a virile impression?"

"You labor under the misconception that a homosexual is an effeminate man. That's old stuff. We know today that the feminine attitudes of some homosexuals are an unconscious camouflage for something more deeply repressed."

"Can psychoanalysis cure homosexuality?"

"Definitely, yes. The confusing difficulty is that our practical knowledge of the curability of that perversion is of very recent date. Previously, the approach was rather pessimistic, and many of my colleagues believe that the only change possible is to reconcile the homosexual to his fate, which means to eliminate his inner feeling of guilt. That change is possible is a fact that has not yet reached the mass of homosexuals."

"Is every homosexual curable?"

"No. There are certain prerequisites necessary, the most important being the wish to change.\* This wish is motivated by unconscious guilt, which in favorable cases

\* For the author's personal opinions and a discussion of fallacies resulting from recent statistics, see "The Myth of a New National Disease," *The Psychiatric Quarterly*, 22, 1, 1948.

can be 'mobilized' and further productively strengthened in analysis."

"I am terribly unhappy and feel that my husband had no right to bring me into this situation. I still love him, and hate him at the same time. Can you understand that? I told myself: Imagine your husband had diabetes, would you divorce him? My answer was, of course I wouldn't. I would see to it that he gets his insulin and arrange his diet accordingly. I know *theoretically* that my husband's queerness is a sickness; still I *feel* repulsion. To top all that, the social pressure is strong. I live in fear of becoming involved in a scandal. In our family certain things just don't happen. And I'm on the verge of such a scandal. Still, I want to give my husband a chance. I must be crazy, but I want that last opportunity."

"Does your husband know that you consulted me?"

"Not yet. I shall speak to him today. If he refuses treatment, I'll have to divorce him. I'll be miserable, but I can't do anything else."

"In that case, go into treatment yourself."

The husband refused treatment, asserting that every third man uses the "homosexual outlet," and that millions of people cannot be wrong.

"My husband tortures me by his sponging and alibiing."

Nothing is more humiliating and tragic for a woman than to find out that she has been married not for love but as an alibi for, or defense against, some unrelated conflict. She feels cheated, and rightly so. This is likewise true when a husband realizes that he married a gold-digger.

In such cases the whole tragi-comedy of errors and misunderstandings, based on the confusion of conscious and unconscious factors, comes into play. Unconscious causes are typically misconstrued as personal malice.

The decisive question, "Why did her woman's instinct never warn her?" is not asked by these women. Likewise neglected is the question of whether or not unconscious self-damaging tendencies were not involved in the victimized woman.

The objective tragedy is undeniable. One has to remind oneself time and again that without the unconscious co-operation of the marriage partner the tragedy would have been avoided from the start.

There are many unconscious reasons why men make an alibi marriage, but the predominant conscious motives are marriage for money, marriage to cover up homosexuality, and marriage to further an imposture.

Here is a typical example of a victimized woman:

"You see in me a typical fool who married a man who just wanted her money. The only thing I can say in my defense is that I just didn't know. I was convinced that my husband truly loved me. I believed that firmly, though I can't say that I was naive. I was familiar with the old advice given to women with money: never get kissed out or kicked out of money . . ."

"What did your husband do for a living at the time you met him?"

"He was a real estate broker. That was only a convenient facade; he turned out to be a real parasite."

"How soon did you find out?"

"He neglected his business, and wanted to live on my money. I divorced him after several months and now,

two years later, I'm still laboring under the shock. I call it Reno-shock. How can I avoid repeating the performance?"

"By analyzing the reasons which pushed you unconsciously into the lamentable situation."

The woman's analysis showed that she inwardly specialized in "being kicked." Her gluttony for punishment later found expression in being "kicked out" of money.

*"My husband tortures me by his drinking."*

Pathologic drinking wrecks many marriages, whether the husband, or wife, or both, are heavy drinkers. It is obvious that not everyone who takes a cocktail before dinner is a drinker. The borderline between addiction and harmless drinking for pleasure is clear-cut. Self-damage and the fact that the pathologic drinker (of either sex) has specific personality traits which are responsible for his addiction are the chief criteria.

Every drinker is an orally regressed person, i.e., a neurotic repeating with eternal monotony the three-act pattern of psychic masochism: "I unconsciously construct defeats; ignorant that I myself engineered my defeats, I fight against my enemies in self-defense and righteous indignation; finally I pity myself because such an injustice could happen only to me."

Pathologic drinking has this oral substructure plus a specific additional factor, since not every orally regressed person is a drinker, though every drinker is orally regressed. What is specific for the drinker is that he fights his unconscious battle with the "refusing" mother of his infancy with liquid means. Such people measure everything—love, kindness, attention—with the nourishing

and pleasure-giving first fluid, milk. In their neurotically distorted fantasy, they were refused, starved, deprived. In reality, they were not, as the fact of their being alive proves. The starvation and deprivation refers, not to the amount of milk received from breast or bottle, but to the offense to their childlike megalomania, when even before the great tragedy of weaning occurred there were delays of seconds or minutes in their feeding. In adult life, the delay or "refusal" is repeated and dramatized in the form of chronic alcoholism. The alcoholic identifies himself unconsciously with the allegedly refusing mother and fills himself—i.e. his mother—with poison.

This statement sounds—as do all unconscious mechanisms—slightly foolish. It has, however, clinical substantiation, as the following incident shows: A man, years before he entered analysis because of compulsive drinking, had a violent conflict with his mother, whom he accused of being responsible for his obtaining what he considered an unfair share of his father's estate. His mother defended herself against these—by the way, unjustified—accusations. During their argument the man drank brandy in enormous quantity. His mother asked him reproachfully: "Why do you drink so heavily?" "What's that to you?" was the son's brusque retort. His mother objected with the sober and rather melancholy statement: "Everything that harms you harms me, too." The son responded by taking two brandies in immediate succession. In evaluating this scene, we have to assume that the man, identifying with his mother, wanted to harm her. He was filling her, so to speak, with poison. Actually he harmed himself; in doing this his self-dam-

aging or psychic masochistic tendencies had their expression.

Besides enjoying his fantasy of revenge, the alcoholic is also enjoying a fantasy of independence, for by proving that he can get as much fluid as he wants, he negates his original dependence on his mother. Both these initial (unconsciously imagined) factors are responsible for the "happy," jocose mood at the start of drinking. The next stage, in typical cases, is the "morose" mood. The first, transitory slave-revolt collapses, and depression (covering psychic masochism) returns. The depression produces counter-forces: a second installment of the slave-revolt is unconsciously presented. This time the desperate situation calls for more desperate means of fighting it: the *bellicose* mood proves this. The senseless quarrels characteristic of this phase are more injurious to the alcoholic than the verbal inanities of the "jocose" phase. The activities of the *bellicose* phase often include sexual activities under dangerous circumstances, fights, destruction of objects, traffic "accidents," and the like. The fourth and last stage is sleep, and the guilt-laden hangover.

How do these alcoholics behave objectively? Their main characteristic is an attitude of refusal. To their wives and children they refuse, either directly or indirectly, stability and security on a financial or social level; along with this goes damage to their reputations. They are failures in making a decent living, or they endanger temporarily achieved success by getting themselves discharged because of alcoholic instability, or they live in constant danger of that calamity. The "aggression" shown by their attitude of refusal is in itself an unconscious defense-mechanism, a denial of their unconscious

masochism, projected upon the innocent family. The unconscious formula seems to be: "I'm not masochistic; on the contrary, I'm aggressive." That his "pseudo-aggression" injures the addict too is explained by the simple fact that a neurotic cannot show aggression without feeling inner guilt, which in turn leads him to self-injury. Last, but not least, the repressed aim returns; psychic masochism enters the scene once more.

These unconscious causes of alcoholic addiction are contrary to the popular belief that people drink to "get rid of inhibitions" and the "tyranny of conscience." The wit who called the superego the alcohol-soluble part of the personality proved his sense of humor, but not his ability to make sound clinical observation.

The marriage of the alcohol addict is typically a bad one, and of course, his characteristic excuse that he drinks because the marriage is bad, is a rationalization. It is the other way around: the psychic masochist, of which the alcoholic is a splendid example, needs constant inner confirmation that everybody behaves as badly toward him as the "bad" mother of his infancy. That is why he often chooses a shrew for a wife. And if the wife is not essentially malicious, he provokes her until she rebels. The argument that unhappy family life leads to drinking is fallacious. Once again, chance is never involved in the choice of a mate; two neurotics, as always, look for neurotic mates and find each other.

Here are a few examples:

1. A business executive of forty lost his position because of his alcoholic instability. He repeatedly absented himself from work for days at a time. Often he came to the office in a drunken state. After the loss of his position he

became very despondent and consented even to undergo psychiatric treatment; but he did not make the slightest effort to re-establish himself in business. Even the typical alcoholic optimism did not work. He declared himself a "washout," and stated that he was "eternally disgraced" and unable to earn money. Asked how he proposed to solve his financial problem, he turned the tables and declared cynically that his wife ought to support him. He pointed out that he had supported "that parasite" for eight years, and now it was her turn to do something for him. His wife was his former secretary: her earning capacity was \$40 a week. When asked how he expected to maintain his \$300 a week standard of living, he replied that that was his wife's headache. Superficially the man's behavior gave the impression of parasitism. What he really wanted was to prove that everybody was "bad" and "refusing." That "proof" he could, of course, achieve only by self-damage.

2. A bachelor of twenty-six, a good-looking college graduate from a well-to-do family, belonged to the "bar-storming" crowd, and had never worked. He had two types of "girl-friends." The first type consisted of girls who liked him; to these he behaved with complete indifference, or left them after a few days. The second type consisted of girls who were frigid and cold, who rejected or teased him, and to these he felt attracted—precisely because through them he obtained his masochistically enjoyed rejection. His specialty was violent alcoholic scenes, during which he would accuse these girls of cruelty, neglect, and what not. He never achieved sexual gratification with them. He was, in general, not interested in sex, as was evident from the fact that he "refused" sexual gratification to the first-type of girl.



3. A manufacturer of forty-five denied his wife's accusation that he was an alcohol addict. "That senseless statement of my wife's is based on the fact that I like to play poker in the evening. If you gamble, you have to smoke and drink. Why does she pick on drinking—why not on oversmoking and gambling?" To this his wife replied that he could afford to lose money; and if he wanted to kill himself by smoking too much, it was his affair. But to force her to escort him home night after night in a more or less drunken state "bothers and disgraces me." The man had been referred to me because of a potency disturbance. His wife had complained to the family physician; the man admitted that "sex was not forthcoming" in his marriage. It turned out that he did not have a potency disturbance at all; he only refused sex. Asked why, he declared that his wife did not deserve a "premium" for nagging. That he himself provoked the whole situation he was not consciously aware.

When women complain that they are the victims of their husband's alcohol addiction, they are hardly justified. Frequently the husband was unconsciously chosen because of and not despite his addiction. The reasons are manifold; here are a few possible ones: (1) rescue-fantasies with a masochistic background; (2) a desire to cover up her own alcoholic impulses (exaggerated in the husband) and so diminish her own sense of guilt; (3) "injustice-collecting" of the masochistic variety.

*"My husband tortures me by his gambling."*

A woman patient once came to me after her husband had squandered a considerable portion of her large fortune by gambling. He was furious because her attorney no longer permitted him to use her funds for gambling

purposes, and threatened to divorce her if she refused to let him regain access to the money. She did not want to lose her husband, nor, on the other hand, her fortune. She possessed strong missionary impulses and, in spite of countless failures, still had hopes of reforming her husband. She did not know that chronic gambling is curable only by psychoanalysis, and then only if the gambler himself wishes to change.

Chronic gambling is a severe and complicated neurosis, of the nature of which the public is entirely ignorant. What I present here is the result of my own investigations. The popular and the psychoanalytic approach may be contrasted as follows:

*Popular opinion:* The gambler is a rational though weak person who wishes to win money. His aim is to gain the maximum amount of money in a minimum amount of time, and without work.

*Psychoanalytic opinion:* The gambler is a misunderstood neurotic who unconsciously wishes to lose. He is a victim of his infantile ideas of grandeur; when gambling, he unconsciously orders the winning chance by magical means from the arsenal of infantile megalomania. Gambling represents an unconscious aggression, directed toward parental authority and expressed by showing up the parents, in projection, as "refusing." By losing, the gambler both expresses and punishes himself for his unconscious wish to be disappointed. When gambling, he experiences a "painful-pleasurable" tension of the masochistic variety, which secondarily makes gambling an unconscious necessity.

Not every one who gambles is a gambler. The term is reserved for a specific group of neurotics characterized by

the following symptoms. (1) The gambler habitually takes chances. (2) The game precludes all other interests. (3) The gambler is full of optimism and never learns from defeat. (4) The gambler never stops when winning. (5) Despite initial caution, he eventually plunges recklessly. (6) A pleasurable-painful thrill is experienced between the time of betting and the outcome of the game.

The strange thing about gambling is the gambler's childlike megalomania and his unconscious wish to lose. Without the thrill of uncertainty, no gambling is pleasurable; the thrill overshadows the greed for money. A patient of mine, treated for pathologic gambling, told me of a game played with fifteen matches by two persons, in which each person has the right to take in his turn one, two, or three matches. The loser is the person who, because it is his turn, has to take the last match. The initiated always wins if he starts by taking two matches and is careful to leave an unequal number of matches each time to his opponent. This cat-and-mouse play was financially agreeable to my patient, since even an intelligent opponent if uninitiated, would not learn the trick before ten or fifteen games had been played; but he told me that after some time he would become bored—"There was no thrill in it." In other words, if you take away the masochismic tension, you destroy the pleasure of gambling. The element of insecurity, regardless of whether one wins or loses, seems to be of prime importance.

The best approach to the unconscious problem of the gambler's psychology is to be found in his astonishing, logically senseless, conviction that he will win. Gambling activates his old, childish fantasy of grandeur and megalomania.

mania. More important, it activates the *latent rebellion* against logic, cleverness, moderation, morals, and renunciation. In that latent rebellion, based on the inwardly never-relinquished "pleasure principle," he scoffs ironically at all rules of education. Heavy inner retaliation is the result. Since all educational rules are given to the child by his mother and father and their representatives (teachers, priests, superiors, etc.), rebellion arouses a deep unconscious feeling of guilt.

How typical the aggression toward the childhood authority is in gamblers is described with the fine intuition of a genius by Dostoevski in *The Gambler*:

In five minutes I accumulated 400 gold pieces in roulette. I should have left at that moment, but a strange feeling came over me—to challenge Fate. It was the wish to give Fate a punch in the nose and to show her my tongue . . .

We have only to substitute for Fate the parental representation of it for the child and we have in a nutshell the psychic situation of the gambler. Priority in all discoveries goes to the poet and dreamer; science describes more precisely, using clinical proofs, and in different terms. In general, scientific discoveries are rediscoveries of truths felt intuitively by poets hundreds of years before.

Hence my conviction that the gambler cannot win in the long run, because losing is needed for his psychic equilibrium—it is the price he pays for his neurotic aggression; at the same time it makes possible the continuation of gambling.

In all this it is of the utmost importance to remember that the aggression against educational rules is but a desperate *defense against the more deeply repressed masochistic attachment*. This is visible, first, in the fact

that only a psychic masochist will express "aggression" under conditions that basically damage him. The gambler's "aggression" is but a covering cloak for self-damage. Secondly, it is visible in the thrill element in gambling which covers thinly veiled masochistic enjoyment.

*"My husband tortures me by neglecting me for his hobbies."*

A patient began her complaint about her husband with an attack. "Do you believe, Doctor, that a woman has a personality of her own?"

"I do."

"And her personality does not disappear and dissolve itself in marriage?"

"It does not."

"Has a woman the right to expect that her personality be taken care of even in marriage?"

"Of course."

"How can my personality be taken care of when my husband spends every evening with his idiotic stamp collection?"

"Don't you like stamps?"

"I hate them."

"Did you know about your husband's hobby before marriage?"

"I did. He showed me his treasures and I even pretended to be interested. But I liked the guy and didn't take his enthusiasm too seriously. How was I to know that those colored papers would turn out to be an unconquerable rival?"

"Have you other complaints about your husband?"

"He is a bore; nothing interests him outside of stamps.

Stamps have first priority in his life. He never goes out with me—just sits with those little papers and adores them. What kind of a life is that? I believe when he makes love to me, he thinks I'm a stamp."

"Does he prevent you from having hobbies of your own?"

"No. But I like a good time and can't go out to night clubs alone. We live in a small community, so that's out. He calls my pleasures 'conventional' and tries to interest me in stamps . . ."

Another woman lamented: "Do you know the story of a physicist who before going on his honeymoon dropped into his laboratory to fetch something, forgot all about his wife, and remained there for three days to be served with divorce papers? That's my husband. He is not a scientist, but a business man, and his hobby is collecting antique furniture. Why, our house is a mess; you can't move without getting something between your legs. It's a museum, a mausoleum, not a livable house . . ."

Still another woman: "You see in me the victim of first editions. It's a laugh, but for me it spells tragedy. My husband collects rare books as a hobby—he is a professor of French—and never spends more than one-tenth of his money for me. I've had to run around with that shabby fur jacket for years because he doesn't give me money for a new one, claiming that that rag is good enough. That attitude of his—if you care to call his cruelty an attitude—goes so far that he bought me as a Christmas present a set of Molière. Imagine that hypocrisy! He bought himself an addition to his collection and called it a present for me. Is that mental cruelty or isn't it?"

*"My husband tortures me by his impatience and perfectionism."*

A lady complained: "Would you believe that my marriage is going on the rocks because of the word 'impatience'? My husband comes home and loses his temper because some piece of furniture is a tenth of an inch 'out of its proper place.' If I fold my napkin, he remarks impatiently that I have no sense of symmetry; if he scrutinizes my make-up he finds that I'm color-blind; if I go to bed he objects to my movements in finding a comfortable position—ad infinitum."

"Did you observe his impatience before marriage, too?"

"I did, but didn't pay much attention. He is a man of high professional standing, and I believed that when he was married he would come down to earth."

"In other words, you believed that you would change your husband."

"Of course."

"And the result?"

"Complete defeat. Things became worse."

"Is the sex life satisfactory?"

"He is impatient there too, and does everything in a hurry."

"Do you mean he suffers from premature ejaculation?"

Blushing and more tears were the answer.

The problem of neurotic impatience is a complicated one.

*"My husband tortures me by his indecision and babyishness."*

"My husband tortures me daily by his inability to reach the most unimportant decisions. Every trifle be-

comes an insurmountable obstacle. I never could figure out whether he can't help it or does it out of sheer malice."

"Could you give a few examples?"

"With pleasure. Our maid wanted a statement for her tax return to the effect that she had been employed for the last three months. Knowing my husband, I typed the letter and asked for his signature. For the last week he has procrastinated, making silly excuses. He seems to be afraid of some danger, though he himself is insured against all possible dangers. Or, to mention another example: We received a notification from the renting agent of the cottage we occupied last year in Martha's Vineyard, asking whether or not we wanted it for this summer too. My husband is now fumbling around and is incapable of deciding whether he wants to spend his vacation in the mountains or at the sea. He seems to be torn between both wishes and is incapable of deciding."

"What you are describing is an obsessional ambivalence, in other words a sickness and not malice."

"That may be so, but in daily life it leads to an intolerable situation."

"Your husband needs treatment."

"He will never consent to that. He finds a thousand excuses for his inability to decide, attaches to everything a string of dangerous possibilities, and weighs these imaginary dangers endlessly. I'm through with letting him torture me, whether it's sickness or malice."

Another woman: "I consider my husband a mixture of a baby and an indecisive child. He is helpless when decisions have to be made, even when the decision is as unimportant as whether to go to one movie or another.



Would you believe it, yesterday he dragged me four times between the movies on Eighty-first and Eighty-third Street and Broadway, unable to make up his mind which of the idiotic pictures he wanted to see!"

Still another: "My husband is crazy with fear if he doesn't conform to certain self-imposed rules. Everybody is slightly superstitious; what he does is just out of this world. Touching certain objects three times, running to the gas jet a hundred times worrying whether or not it was closed, crossing to the opposite side of the street because he saw a certain type of dog which he considers a bad omen, forbidding me to wear a new dress because it was bought in a shop the name of which reminds him of some man who committed suicide—well, where is the limit?"

All three women were obviously married to obsessional or compulsive neurotics. These people shift inner conflicts to harmless external events, suffer from "ambivalence" and indecision. It is a serious neurotic disease which tortures the environment no less than the victim.

The three women considered their respective husbands "malicious." Actually they were objectively sick; nonetheless, the results were tragic for their wives, who were not familiar with the existence of such a disease. I once analyzed a woman who was afraid of coming into contact with glass. Another woman had a wash-compulsion, worrying whether her hands were clean, and used between 400 and 500 towels daily. A third woman left her native country, because she was incapable of touching its money: she was afraid that by touching it she could come in contact with a man whom she wanted to avoid. She even suggested to the mayor of her city that the sewage

of her district should be diverted; when dumped into the river, it might be eaten by a fish which when caught might be eaten by this man in a restaurant. Her other "preventive" measures were no less extensive. In all three cases, husbands and families alike believed that malice was involved.

"My husband tortures me with his worries and hypochondria."

One woman said: "My life is boredom personified. Remember Byron's lines:

Society is now one polished horde  
Formed of two mighty tribes, the Bores and Bored.

The 'bore'—that's my husband; the 'bored' is me. Seriously, what would you say if you were supposed to find your only fun in someone else's worries? What's my husband's only topic of conversation? He is a first-class worrier who is a genius at imagining possible disasters. If I try to comfort him, he gets impatient; if I minimize his pessimism, he gets furious. Such a life shouldn't happen to a dog. Well, it happens to be my life."

"Has your husband changed? Was he, as you call it, always a 'first-class worrier?'"

"At the time I met him, he was a rather gloomy and melancholy person. He paid me compliments, saying I was the only person who could cheer him up."

"In other words, you didn't 'buy a cat in the bag.' You knew beforehand of your husband's gloomy disposition?"

"I believed naively that I could change him, and was proud of my influence."

"You were naive. A gloomy disposition is a popular

misnomer for depression. Depression—if not psychotic—is a neurotic manifestation which cannot be changed or corrected by anything but psychiatric treatment.”

“How was I to know that? They don’t teach you abnormal psychology in schools.”

“If you hadn’t been neurotic yourself, you would have avoided that type of man.”

“What about a woman’s influence?”

“A woman’s influence cannot change a neurosis.”

“I don’t believe you. Perhaps it’s my fault.”

“Nobody can prevent you from accusing yourself. Your real problem is, however, quite different. Why did you choose just that type of man?”

“My life,” said another woman, “is plain torture, and it is all my husband’s fault. He is a hypochondriac. Every day the same dance: ‘Look at my eyes, do you see something?’ The next day: ‘Look at my lip, do you see a swelling?’ The following morning it’s his cough, his digestion, his pimples, and so on endlessly. His questions are merely rhetorical; whatever I answer he continues to worry about his health. The guy is healthy as a horse; still he runs from one doctor to another, spends money, takes hundreds of medicines.”

“Did you know about your husband’s hypochondria before marrying him?”

“I did, but I didn’t pay much attention. We met at a summer resort, and he would refuse to go out in the evening, blaming the fog. After lunch he always took a nap. And he would refuse a second cocktail, giving me a lecture on gastric juices. But, as I say, I took it rather as a joke. Imagine a grown-up being scared by a little fog. I thought: You will have to change. After marriage I dis-

covered that he was unchangeable. Even his sex is imbued with hundreds of fears."

"How come that all these little signs didn't warn you that you were confronted with a severe neurotic?"

"I'm not a physician, but . . ."

"But a glutton for unconscious punishment."

*"My husband tortures me by never talking to me (or by always talking)."*

The grievances of two women, though it was not apparent on the surface, had the common denominator of martyrdom.

1. "My husband kills me with silence. Imagine a man who doesn't talk to you at all and opens his mouth only to utter a few telegraphic commands relating to his comfort. It's like living in solitary confinement. When I reproach him he claims he's tired."

2. "My husband kills me with his garrulity. He talks like a waterfall and gives me no chance to put two words in edgewise. The tragic thing is that he always says the same things. His jokes are stale, repetitious, and boring. He likes company, and I nearly die of boredom when he starts his collection of bad jokes. Before he even opens his mouth, I know what he'll say . . ."

Both ladies claimed that before marriage they were unaware of these traits in their husbands. Pressed for information, they had to admit that they had made pertinent observations before marriage, but had believed that they could effect a change. Both had specific unconscious reasons for choosing exactly these types of men. One woman, without knowing it, repeated with her husband a situation she had gone through with her older brother,

who had brought her up after her father's early death. The brother had talked constantly, "preaching and teaching." Both women were unaware that they themselves unconsciously reconstructed the situation they complained of, and considered themselves innocent victims.

*"My husband tortures me by constantly reminding me of my duties."*

"You know how boring and monotonous housework really is. One's only reward is to make a person whom one loves a comfortable home. At best it implies giving up a part of one's personality, even if one can afford a maid. My husband doesn't appreciate my efforts at all, treats me like an idiot, and constantly reminds me of my duties. His constant refrain is: 'Don't forget this, don't forget that.' He's continually rubbing it in unpleasantly."

"Why does your husband remind you constantly of things not to be forgotten? Do you forget them otherwise?"

"That depends on where you place your emphasis. I don't claim that I'm a paragon at remembering unpleasant duties. But he acts like a disagreeable tutor who, under the pretext of reminding you of the necessary things, gets pleasure out of reminding you of all the trivial things as well. That implies that he doesn't accept me as an adult with equal rights."

"Do you suspect that your husband acts out with you the tutor-child act in reverse?"

"I don't get you."

"I am repeating what you told me: he acts like a tutor, making you the naughty child."

"But you said 'in reverse.' How's that?"

"If your suspicion is correct, he is repeating an undigested childhood experience: It could be that he was once the naughty child confronted with an aggressive educator. To restore his narcissism—our word for self-esteem and self-love—he reverses the roles."

"That's possible: he was brought up by a really nasty stepmother. But I don't care for psychological explanations: I am personally hurt by this attitude."

"Don't you see that if a really neurotic reaction is involved, he doesn't mean you?"

"But I am scolded."

"I suggest that I see your husband."

He came reluctantly and rather angrily. "I am a busy man. Why should I be bothered by my wife's hysterics?"

"Is her statement correct—that you act with her the dissatisfied tutor?"

"Nonsense. She has not one but a dozen chips on her shoulder. Every word I speak she puts on a scale, and one-thousandth of a nuance is weighed."

"How is your marriage?"

"Why do you pry into my affairs?"

"Your attitude is slightly ridiculous; you forget that your wife consulted me."

"Yes; I thought you would give her a dressing down and straighten her out. Instead you are calling me on the carpet."

"Your own guilt makes you feel that way. The facts are; you both cooperate in making a mess out of this marriage."

"Do you really think the marriage is endangered?"

"Definitely. Your wife is unhappy; she speaks of

mental cruelty and of not being able to stand it any longer. Somebody has to change."

"She is hysterical and neurotic."

"That's what you see. You overlook the fact that you are, as you admit, nagging and rather disagreeable in your constant admonitions."

"What do you want me to do?"

"First, give me some information about yourself. Are you always so pompous and solemn?"

"I resent that. I am a serious person. But that doesn't mean that I am the sourpuss you make me out."

"For my information, what would your best friend and your worst enemy, respectively, say about you?"

He wiped his forehead. "You make it tough for me. Well, my best friend would say that I'm a serious and reliable person."

"Is that all? What about the department of fun?"

He was shrinking in his chair. "He would say that I am a serious person."

"What's the matter with your sense of humor?"

"All right, I admit that I take life too seriously."

"Why?"

"Life is a serious matter."

"How can you make a woman comfortable—to avoid the word 'happy'—with your mental attitude?"

"Do you want me to dance and sing? Life is serious."

"You told me that."

"It's true."

"If you don't provide fun, life's 'seriousness' changes into tragedy. Do you want to weep and complain constantly?"

"What do you want me to do?"

"First take stock of your neurotic attitude. Under the disguise of the phrase 'life is serious,' you hide depression."

"Can you make me gay?"

"Your pronounced tragic mood seems neurotic to me. Your funless attitude will drive every woman away."

"That's the reward for consenting to my wife's request to see a psychiatrist. The end is that you want to take me into treatment."

"I am sure that you both need treatment."

To my surprise the marriage was repaired analytically. It became clear during treatment that neither wife nor husband was an innocent victim of the mate's neurosis, as they had both claimed.

*"My husband tortures me by forgetting my soul."*

"Damn it, I hate big words but I can't help using them in this instance. My husband forgets that I have a soul."

"Could you be more specific?"

"Well, he treats me like a mechanical doll who needs good food, nice clothes, and an expensive apartment. True, he is a good provider. I would lie if I pretended that I don't enjoy modest luxury. Still, something is missing. He doesn't take me intellectually as an equal; he has a rather superior attitude when I venture an opinion. The general impression he gives, when he bothers to listen to me at all, is 'Look who's talking.' I admit that sometimes his rather contemptuous smile makes the new dress (given as compensation for being treated as an unintellectual doll, or so it seems) quite unimportant."

"Have you complained to your husband?"



"I have. He pretends that he doesn't understand what I'm talking about. This superior attitude of his makes me furious. Men just don't accept women as equals and can't be persuaded to have a real intellectual companionship with them."

"Why did you attach yourself to a man who doesn't accept a woman as an equal?"

"How was I to know? In the beginning, everything looked different: gallantry and sex obscured the picture."

"Were there any small signs from which you could have deduced his real attitude?"

"In retrospect, I find such signs. At the time, I didn't pay any attention . . ."

One can safely state that ready-made formulas are as frequently used as they frequently fail to cover the subject. When a typical husband is furious with his wife, he calls her "hysterical"; when a wife feels the same way, she considers herself the innocent victim of "mental cruelty." Both marriage partners feel cheated out of something.

It is amazing, in retrospect, how often the ladies "overlooked" the "little signs" of the neurosis of which they were later to complain. Unknowingly, they were full partners in crime in "mental cruelty."

No one wishes to defend the gallery of neurotic husbands presented above. One thing is clear: marriage is for adult persons. Neurotics go through the motions of marriage only to misuse that institution as a stage for their infantile repetition-repertoire.

A woman in love forgives many things, even her husband's babyishness. However, whereas not too neurotic

persons compromise and, if possible, identify, neurotics are "injustice-collectors." There is quite a difference.

The irony of the "synchronization of neurotic behavior patterns" is that the accompanying music is a cacophony of shouts, fights, complaints, reproaches, and tears. Whereas two normal persons with similar 'likes' and 'dislikes' achieve some degree of harmony, two neurotics with similar 'likes' and 'dislikes' show on the surface only disharmony. The difference is exactly the difference between conscious and unconscious pleasure. The latter, however, must be covered up. Whoever doubts the fact that behind that superficial disharmony lie deep unconscious pleasure and equally satisfying appeasement of the inner conscience in the form of defense-mechanisms, should ask himself why these constantly unhappy people, who seemingly hate each other, so often stick together. Onlookers often venture pessimistic prognoses concerning the future of such marriages. Their prognoses only too often turn out to be erroneous—the glue of neurosis holds such marriages together

## CHAPTER SIX

### Precautions and Remedies

THE question of whether or not it is possible to take any voluntary counteraction to a barrage of "mental cruelty," is a complex one. It presupposes a certain amount of inner honesty with oneself, including the application of a certain amount of knowledge. Only the latter can be supplied. Here it is in general terms.

1. Understand that there are no innocent victims in marital fights. If your wife is a "shrew," unconsciously you asked for it; if your husband is "unreliable" or "impossible," you asked for it too—again unconsciously. There is *something* in you which (though not of your conscious volition) pushed you into your unhappy situation.

2. Understand that an impersonal conflict is involved—with you on the receiving end. The moment clear-cut neurotic reactions of major proportions are visible, realize that your mate is using you, once more without being in the slightest degree aware of it, as a movie screen on which to reel off an infantile conflict. Before becoming angry at this misuse of your own cherished personality, keep in mind that you are no less guilty: you do likewise with your mate. This is exactly what

neurosis means: both you and your mate unconsciously carry around an unresolved infantile conflict and repeat it endlessly. *You picked your mate, and were picked by your mate, for exactly that purpose.*

The rather grotesque fact is that all the barbs stuck into you, and for that matter, all the barbs you stick into your mate, are aimed actually at someone in his or your infancy.

3. Understand and try to minimize your "martyr-complex." Every time you bemoan your dreary fate, you 'enjoy,' of course without knowing it, the poison of psychic masochism.

Understanding of this three-part pattern—personal guilt, impersonal conflict, martyr complex—is of some use only when the amount of neurotic involvement is not too extensive. A fire extinguisher for home use cannot substitute for the fire department. The former represents "first aid," but the latter is necessary if the conflagration is of major proportions. Similarly, if a neurosis is of unmanageable proportions, only psychiatry can help you.

All precautions against being submerged in "mental cruelty" presuppose, as already indicated, a certain amount of intellectual honesty. In other words, one's ability to deceive oneself—and in general, no ability in the entire psychic apparatus is better developed—must not be too extensive.

So far as this universal tendency toward self-deception is concerned, one finds marked differences between the sexes. Interestingly enough, men are more often fooled about their mates' infidelity than are women. Here femi-

nine instinct, insight, or whatever we want to call it,\* is a better guide than man's narcissism. I have been surprised to see in clinical analysis how many women have known of their neurotic husband's secret affairs. Some of them have rebelled; some have divorced their husbands; many have tolerated the situation with an attitude of: "He is such a baby, despite his gray hairs. He just has to prove to himself that he is still young."

Man's attempt at superiority in marriage is also counteracted by his wife's good memory. The wife remembers for instance, the immature and shivering boy stammering his marriage proposal. If a woman is normal, she will think back to that situation—and to many others in which her man exhibited clumsiness, for instance, the wedding night—with sentimental kindness. If she is aggressive, or if her husband overplays his act of superiority in later life, precisely these memories will stamp him in her eyes as an immature boy.

There is no reason to underestimate the reality of the masculine neurosis with which women have to cope. Nor the opposite! One of the most typical complaints of young girls is that men are either "immature idiots" or "wolves." Lack of tenderness coupled with the wish for immediate<sup>x</sup> intercourse is abhorrent to the more normal girl, and justifiably so. A normal woman permits intercourse only when she loves the man, and there is no reason why young people who love each other should not marry. However, women are frequently confronted

\* Only in respect to man's potency disturbance does intuition not help a woman. She invariably comes to the conclusion that her husband does not love her any more. Knowledge of the existence of neurosis, together with the realization that her husband's trouble started in childhood, long before he knew her, will eradicate this misconception more and more.

with men who only want to go to bed with them—because they “like” their body. The normal girl reacts with disgust, depression, or indignation, wondering if perhaps all men are “impossible.”

The extent of promiscuity today proves simply that there are no fewer neurotic women than men. The result of promiscuity is invariably an unsatisfactory “impersonal” sex relationship. Normal men and women, on the other hand, choose exclusively a sexual partner whom they love tenderly, too. Two components—the tender and the sensual—add up to the phenomenon “love.” And normal people insist on love in sex because they have had the experience that sex tastes better under such circumstances. Young people who stick to this rule are not only bowing to moral conventions, they also are following the dictates of common sense.

The naive male also harbors illusions about his prowess in the field of conquest. The idea that he can “conquer” a woman is one of the most unjustified of masculine conceptions. No man ever conquered a woman; she decided to give in, consciously or unconsciously, leaving to him the illusion of conquest. That game has for neurotics many unconscious and conscious advantages. For the woman who has unconscious feelings of guilt about sex, the illusion of being forced by the man removes the guilt and enables her to shift the responsibility, on the grounds that she is the victim of brute force. For the man this illusion bolsters the always-tottering hoax of the “he-man.” In these two instances the process is unconscious. More often the only person fooled is the man. The woman decides long before he plays his tricks of persuasion or force that she will finally go to bed with him. He is unaware of her decision, however, and fancies

himself a conqueror. When both partners are neurotic, they each carry around the unconscious concept that sex is forbidden, and therefore can enjoy sex only when that condition exists. It is amazing how often the man is fooled in this game of "conquest," and how seldom the woman. Only too often she inwardly mocks at his show of force and prefabricated line.

Intellectual understanding, so important in marriage, is another sphere in which the woman is not fooled. Because business has become so specialized and because women's abilities are generally underestimated, the man usually has a more "interesting" profession than the woman; this is especially true when the woman's duties are in the household. The very men who so often complain that women change facts to suit their own purpose come home time and again with a blown-up story of the day's events, usually omitting their own defeats. Women see through all this—and console their men or listen with interest. But when they themselves start to relate their day's experiences, with more or less color, the men are "bored." What the men do not understand is that two people cannot stick together without forming a "mutual admiration society." Men are more often at fault in this respect than women. Of course, I am referring to women who are not too neurotic. A neurotic woman is more likely to side automatically with her husband's adversary.

Many a marriage is blanketed with what one patient called the "tragedy of silence." This silence does not fool the woman either. Said this patient: "My husband has little to say in the evening. He tries his best, but lapses into silence. I know he doesn't blame me but the

institution of marriage. Perhaps two people really exhaust their subjects of conversation?"

No, women are seldom fooled. There is, however, one element in woman's makeup which tends to frustrate her intuition and to nullify the advantages of her keener perceptions, and which alone explains why so often the man is able to get away with murder. This element is woman's psychic masochism. The unconscious tendency to accept suffering as a pleasure is biologically\* present in every human being. There are perhaps teleologic reasons why this tendency is exaggerated in women: child-birth, menstruation, conditions connected with both—with regard to all these a certain amount of masochism is an advantage.

Thomas Moore once wrote these lines:

Weep on, and as thy sorrows flow  
I'll taste the luxury of woe.

Well, women do taste more than their share of the "luxury of woe." Not understanding this predilection of women, man pats himself on the shoulder, thinking how smart he is and how he has fooled his wife.

To return to the problem of how to live in peace with one's untreated neurosis, what advice, in summary, can we give to the intelligent person who does not fool him-

\* Freud assumed two basic drives—the death instinct and the life instinct. These two instincts are clinically never visible in pure form, but are seen in derivatives of their amalgams. This accounts for the redirecting of "primary" masochism, directed against one's self, into aggression toward the outer world. Clinically, psychic masochism always has the same case history: It is originally aggression toward an authoritative person of one's childhood, with resultant feelings of guilt. This guilt is secondarily "sexualized," in neurotic conditions, and unconsciously accepted as pleasure. When one speaks about the greater masochization of women, one means greater readiness for masochism. This artificial structure accounts for the therapeutic possibility in psychoanalysis of reversing the process and curing masochists.



self too extensively about his real troubles? The only possible answer is: the conflict is in you and has nothing to do with the rationalizations you conveniently blame. If you discard them, you are still confronted with suffering which you simply have to take, mitigating it as much as you are able to. Understand that you aren't a unique exception; many conflicts take care of themselves—after some time. Don't lose your sense of proportion; life goes on with changing troubles.

Actually, of course, no real improvement is possible without changing the basic structure of the personality. Since this is possible only in psychiatric therapy, every other answer is simply a circumlocution avoiding the painful "Little can be done." Still, it is true that "many conflicts take care of themselves"—after some time. What this means is that, as we have seen, people who suffer from mental anguish are really also "masochistic gluttons for punishment," they enjoy their troubles—unconsciously. Of course, that does not help them consciously. Consciously, they really suffer. But even a good sized accumulation of the inner wish to suffer at a specific time exhausts itself temporarily. Paradoxically, the suffering carries its own antidote—the quantitative factor. True, after some time, the old conflict reaccumulates, and the process begins anew—but with new rationalizations.

The main difficulty in making people understand that the unconscious is the real boss of the personality lies in their stubborn belief that logic, common sense, and will power can cope successfully with every situation. Disbelief in the unconscious does not change facts: both disbelievers and believers in the power of the sun will acquire, if exposed to the "nonexistent" sun for a suf-

ficient time, a sunstroke. *Mutatis mutandis*: "expose" yourself for a sufficient time to an unconscious conflict which is fed by repressed infantile sources, and a large-sized neurosis becomes all at once visible, whether or not you acknowledge the existence of that internal "sun."

What makes people so sure that they are their own masters? It is their unwillingness to accept that something in them which is stronger than the conscious self. Basically, it is the old and inwardly never abandoned infantile "omnipotence." Add to that a natural resentment at feeling pushed, once more, into the passive situation, the same passivity against which every individual fights a lifelong battle, and the general unwillingness to accept the power of the unconscious becomes less mysterious.

The question, then, of how to live in relative peace with one's own untreated neurosis, reduces itself to the amount of self deception one is capable of. The suffering of neurosis is taken care of in depression, dissatisfaction, or at least lack of contentment. That suffering appeases the inner conscience, which mercifully allows the neurotic to consider himself the innocent victim of other people's meanness. The bitter accusations that the neurotic hurls constantly at others provide him with his *modus vivendi*, permitting him the illusion of being not masochistic, but aggressive.

Assuming that greater knowledge of the working of the unconscious could be disseminated and even partially absorbed,\* neurotic suffering cannot be changed by in-

\* Sometimes neurotic fears are disguised as ignorance. In these cases dissemination of knowledge is not effective: one doubt is simply replaced by another. Where the person is merely misinformed, knowledge is welcomed—provided that other affectively conditioned reasons do not prevent at least intellectual understanding.

tellectual knowledge alone. The best one can achieve is resignation and a little narcissistic pleasure from knowing the general causes. Still, that resignation can be "lived" with or without some good grace.

The overall picture, of course, also contains some causes for optimism. Though it is a hopeless task to make neurotics understand—outside of actual analytic treatment—that their sorrows are unconsciously self-chosen, self-provoked, and self-perpetuated, everyone can understand other people's neuroticism much better than his own. If one explains that a neurotic never sees reality as it is, but unconsciously misuses reality as a hitching-post for bygone conflicts, it is sometimes possible to make people understand that they are willy-nilly "second editions" and substitutes for someone else. The infantile conflict pertaining to mother, father, brother, or sister is—without conscious knowledge—unconsciously repeated on the innocent mate. The latter has committed but one "crime": in some way he or she resembles one of the original actors. At bottom, the whole repetitive pattern is based on mistaken identity. This is the unconscious fact; still, the afflicted victims take the attack very personally: "How can he (she) do this to me?"

If it were possible to make people understand the completely impersonal nature of the torments they endure a great diminution of mental misery could be achieved. Perhaps then we might hear a little more often the cry that arises when the sheriff arrests an innocent bystander: "You've got the wrong man!"



**PART III**

**MARITAL**

**CAPTIVITY**



## CHAPTER SEVEN

### Catalogue of Twelve Marital Difficulties

CYNICS and moralists alike have been trying since time immemorial to define the value of marriage. They have generally come, after much deep thinking, to an identical, though banal, conclusion: there are happy and unhappy marriages. The difference of opinion rests on the accent: the cynic stresses the bad marriage as the rule and the good marriage as the negligible exception, whereas the moralist does exactly the opposite, substituting moral requirements for observable facts.

Both approaches are scientifically meaningless. They are too conspicuously influenced by personal factors and preconceived notions. Both cynic and moralist are out to prove something *a priori*.

What are the facts? Marriage has deep unconscious, purely emotional, reasons, quite apart from all external advantages or disadvantages. Every discussion of the problem of marriage which overlooks these unconscious and fully irrational motives does not even approach the real problem. Nobody denies the social, economic, procreative, and purely sexual factors involved in marriage. At the head of the priority list, however, stands the human being's emotional affinity to marriage.

The emotional affinity to marriage stems from the

nursery. Before the child has even heard of, even less digested his ABC, he was instilled with a positive-wishful approach to monogamy. Mind you, not only marriage, but monogamy, was implanted in the child—not exactly with his mother's milk, but with his baby cereals given at the age of one and a half to three.

How is that possible? The typical child is reared in the cultural family where there is one father and one mother. Every child goes through the phase of the Oedipus complex. As explained briefly in an earlier chapter, the Oedipus complex denotes conscious, later unconscious, identification with the parent of the same sex and conscious, later unconscious, competition for "possession" of the parent of the opposite sex. In the boy, it means: "I want to take father's place, be as powerful as he is, and get mother's exclusive love." In the girl it means: "I want to usurp mother's position and monopolize father's exclusive love." What children imagine as being the sexual substratum of love and sex, has no connection with adult conceptions; the child's sexual misconceptions are legion. As far as narcissistic components are concerned, the child knows precisely what it wants: exclusiveness. Exclusiveness, the continuation of the fantasy of omnipotence.

Hence the basic inclination toward marriage and monogamy is built up in the child *long before* it can rationally evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of marriage.

Does any person believe that breathing was "accepted" by the baby because of his knowledge of blood chemistry? No more is the foundation of the child's "emo-



tional affinity to marriage" logically influenced. It is an involuntary reaction, an unconscious identification.

Since that underlying oedipal attitude is a universal infantile experience, everybody opposed to marriage on "logical" grounds can automatically be classified as neurotic. Of course, that statement is not reversible; not everybody who marries acquires automatically with the marriage license a certificate of health. There is a superabundance of neurotic marriages.

Marriage is at best a complicated procedure involving a series of adjustments, compromises, and sacrifices. All this is accepted because of one's unconscious affinity to marriage—that is, a remnant from infancy in the unconscious personality. The real or imaginary happiness derived from marriage comes second.

What is unconsciously repeated in marriage depends on the inner stencil projected onto the mate. Since the imprint varies with the individual, one finds all types of neurotic and healthy marriages.

The normal person chooses a mate for the pursuit of happiness. He wants a satisfactory sexual relationship and a lifelong companion who will identify with him in his troubles, fights, difficulties, and occasional successes. His search for a duplicate of his own ego is not conscious at all; nevertheless, it is even more decisive than the purely sexual factor. (For a discussion of that problem, see the chapter "Neurotics Can't Love" in *Divorce Won't Help*.)

Confronted with the inexhaustible variations of marital misery, it is difficult to find a common denominator. Clinical experience teaches that chance is never involved in marital fiascos, and regularly confirms the observation

that both marriage partners are neurotically sick. External appearances are sometimes deceptive: the neurosis of one marriage partner may at a specific moment be further advanced than that of the other; in these cases the outsider considers the former neurotic, the latter healthy.

Does this imply that only neurotic people fail in marriage? It does not. It happens—rarely enough—that two people come to the conclusion that they have made a mistake, and separate. However, that is not the typical sequence of events. Usually, we find that two neurotics were attracted to one another because the neuroses of the wife and of the husband contained complementary features.

How can we prove that statement? Once more clinical experience has the last word. And that unbiased observation teaches that in the next marriage (though mate, name, location, apartment, furniture, etc. are changed) the contents of the conflict remain identical. The second, third, and *n*th marriage are but repetitions of the previous one.\*

The following catalogue of twelve marital difficulties does not pretend to be complete, though it covers most of the common causes of marital disaster.

In analyzing any specific marriage, however, one must take care not to be fooled by conscious rationalizations, whether they are social,† cultural, economic, or what have you.

\* It happens only in exceptional cases that the neurotic tendency spends itself in the first marriage, allowing the second marriage to function happily in a moderate psychic climate.

† For a discussion of the social rationalizations, see Chapter VII, *Divorce Won't Help*.

1. *Mutual adjustment and external or "reality factors."* Whenever two persons live together, a series of adjustments and compromises is necessary. That truism is constantly used by the uninformed outer world to explain why two people failed in their marriage. Nothing is further from clinical facts: reality factors contribute approximately one-tenth to marital conflicts, and even to that extent are chiefly used to cover up deeper incongruities.

It is, of course, true that conflicts seemingly centering around money, social status, and the sociologic framework in general frequently dominate the scene of marital conflicts. The reason is obvious: deeper and unconscious conflicts find expression in superficial and conscious disagreements. An observer who is taken in by the surface picture is no less in error than is the detective who follows the clues planted by the criminal to put him on the wrong track.

The fallacy in taking the conscious expressions of marital conflicts at face value is especially pronounced in marriages of convenience. I have treated dozens of women with the gold-digger complex who, despite their neurotic overestimation of money and social position, put both in jeopardy by some escapade of their own. Consciously, they clung desperately to money; unconsciously they endangered their hold on that overestimated commodity.

Take the most extreme example: a woman of higher social status marries a man beneath her station. She finds herself isolated from her friends. The conflict seems to be a social one; but analysis of the woman proves that in

unconscious reality she maneuvered herself into that situation because of some unconscious conflict.

The same explanation applies to intermarriages in a society that rejects that institution.

2. *Feeling of being chained and exploited.* Neurotics who complain of the time-honored institution of marriage are apt to consider themselves exploited slaves, "bound hand and foot." These marital rebels will admit to everything when asked why they got themselves into their marital conflict by marrying in the first place: they were "just ignorant," "did not think clearly," were "fools of the first order," were "taken in." In short, every mental quirk is conceded, except the real one; the underlying neurosis.

For normal people, marriage and slavery have nothing in common. The pretense of neurotics that they are marital captives is a typical defense-mechanism. Especially unsound is the husband's typical complaint that "marriage means paying, paying, paying," and the wife's that "I sacrificed the best years of my life to my husband." Why are both wrong?

It is the acknowledged custom in our society that the husband is the family provider. The husband who rebels against it is as a rule a neurotic who has not made the normal transition from receiving baby to giving adult. The greatest weakling becomes in his fantasy a super-he-man when giving money to his wife. As we have already observed, this is his favorite disguise of his inner passivity. Women who complain about "giving their best years" to their husband are no less neurotic. Marriage is not a business deal; nobody forced these women to marry their husbands.

3. *Fantasy of missed opportunities.* There are no marriages in which both participants—though at different times and occasions—have not asked themselves the painful question: Couldn't I have found a more congenial mate? The question is posed mostly in situations of conflict and is rarely answered in the negative; the whole deliberation ends with anger, self-pity, and self-commiseration.

The tragi-comedy of the situation consists of the fact that the unhappy choice neurotic marriage partners complain of was not made by chance. It corresponds to the specific wishes and defenses characteristic for that particular personality. Hence without knowledge of that personality, the marriage is incomprehensible.

The *quid pro quo* is rooted in the fact that neurotic pleasures are completely unconscious. The surface reverberations are misery, depression, dissatisfaction. These painful feelings are the bribe offered to the inner conscience for its permission to enjoy repressed wishes. The whole neurotic deal rests on this bribe. Those consciously perceived painful feelings blind the individual to his real unconscious aims.

The complaint about "missed opportunities" in marriage is reducible to the simple fact that unconscious and conscious tendencies are not at all identical. Expanding that general formulation, we find:

a) Cases in which marriage was entered into because of unconscious wishes to be mistreated. The vast masochistic possibilities embedded in that unconscious attitude are counteracted by the superego, which, anti-libidinous as it is, ferrets out the unconscious pleasure-gain and forces the unconscious ego to chronic depressive

and defensive complaints. In these cases the complaints and consciously experienced unhappiness cloak the continued enjoyment of a specific unconscious pleasure.

Paradigmatic are marriages in which the husband complains about his wife's governess-like tone. The reproach contains elements of unconscious hypocrisy—her “mis-treatment” is exactly what that type of husband desires most. At the same time, she satisfies well the normal, or more precisely, undiseased parts of his personality. That type of woman treats men like babies. “I never felt that way, I married her,” said such a man. Here remnants of his wish to be loved are discernible. But even that has to be taken with a grain of salt; the wish to be loved serves also to appease his superego, which accused him (very justifiably) of the masochistic wish to be rejected. To counteract that accusation, he magnifies defensively the wish to be loved. That can be easily proven: why does that type of man have to provoke time and again the situation of conflict?

b) Cases in which marriage was entered into out of penance and submission to superego reproaches. Typical is the marriage of the woman mentioned previously whose husband was a “secondhand edition of a diplomat.” After her short-lived rebellion against her mother, to whom she was homosexually attached, a rebellion manifesting itself in her “gangster-period”; she accepted (because of inner guilt and psychic masochism) her mother's precepts and married not her real husband but the ideal picture of the “distinguished” gentleman so dear to her mother. Her subsequent complaints about her missed opportunities actually did not pertain to her husband but to the poor bargain she was able to wrest from

her inner conscience. At the same time, they were a pseudo-hypocritical mask for her masochistic enjoyment.

c) Cases in which marriage was entered into principally in order to permit the functioning of an unconscious defense mechanism. A typical example is provided by the woman who marries to take revenge on the species "man," whose biological differences she never forgives. For not being a man herself, the woman takes vengeance on the whole male sex, devoting her life to humiliating the sample she has chosen. The husband is a veritable weakling, a Milquetoast of the first order. She humiliates him with the greatest cruelty. The repressed material, though, comes to the fore, and she accuses even that caricature of a man of masculine arrogance.

d) Cases in which marriage was entered into because one's own repressed traits are caricatured in the partners. It is a form of unconscious repartee. One's own repressed tendencies are lived out with the inner alibi: I don't want that.

e) Cases in which one partner or another comes unconsciously to realize that a situation from his infancy is being uncannily repeated in marriage—the same situation the person wanted to avoid at all costs.

People who whine about missed opportunities in marriage are not crying over spilled milk. They are complaining—though they do not know it—about the unhappy liaison of two facts: first, that unconsciously they get exactly what they wanted; and second, that they must pay for that Trojan horse with conscious unhappiness.

4. *The unwarranted, hence thwarted, expectation that marriage will be a paradise on earth.* The child in the adult approaches marriage with unattainable unconscious

expectations. Marriage is to guarantee perpetual happiness, guiltlessness, and a few other nice things.

Geographically, it seems to be located between the Garden of Eden and Elysium.

Department of conflicts: nonexistent.

Previous disappointments: marriage will correct them.

Starting point of happiness: wedding day.

Duration of bliss: "till death do us part."

Where, as inevitably happens, illusion sets in people who married with these high expectations are angry with marriage rather than with their infantile and exaggerated hopes.

Especially tragic in its effects is the illusion that marriage starts with the wedding day. Marriage starts truly in the nursery, and is practically as old as any of the participants, minus six to ten months. Conflicts, fantasies, prejudices, misconceptions stemming from that early time are projected onto the mate.

This fact accounts also for the shifting of blame onto the innocent-guilty partner. The bearer of these fantasies of perpetual marital happiness does not know that the fate of the marriage was determined even before he laid eyes on the future wife or husband. For him (or her) life starts anew with the wedding day; hence all "crimes" are related directly to the mate. The multitude of sins of which husband and wife accuse each other are but repetitions of unconsciously self-chosen, self-created, and self-perpetuated attitudes.

No less dangerous in its effects is the fantasy that marriage is a clinic for all previously experienced disappointments. Marriage recreates in neurosis all these unconsciously self-provoked disappointments.



Husband and wife enter marriage with the assumption that marriage is a patent medicine. They present their "checks for a billion units of happiness," to quote a patient, and get "a down payment of chronic unhappiness." The bitter man exaggerated, but if one restricts the statement to the fact that not all dreams of happiness are fulfilled in matrimony, the observation is correct. Of course, the question remains unanswered of why people ask so much of marriage in the first place.

5. *The unexpected "ambivalence" of the mate.* "Ambivalence" refers to the presence of two contradictory feelings toward the same person at the same time.

The most bitter disappointment in marriage is the realization that the mate does not always and under all circumstances identify with the marriage partner. The better the marriage, the more complete is that identification.

"We have identical interests, and still my wife is prone to defend my enemy," complained a patient bitterly. He did not mention that he had masochistically chosen a shrew.

A man who objected to his wife's "governess-like tone" mused: "Every time my wife chooses to use that tone, I feel as if I have an enemy in my home. That embitters me violently; I feel then how little we really have in common. I must admit that this not-being-one-team gives me a shock. First, I was surprised, later indignant, finally, I became resigned, though now and then overcome by helpless fury."

The ability to see only one side of the picture is characteristic of these complaints. People in general have infantile ideas about "marital unity" and make no allowances for aggressive feelings at all. The infantile part of

the personality lives emotionally on the basis of omnipotence and exclusive love. The human being does not fulfill these highly pitched expectations. A *nonambivalent human relation does not exist*; still it is expected. The result is disappointment and self-pity.

It is exactly the imperfect structure of human nature that, when ignored, causes the greatest marital disasters. Life teaches adults a primitive lesson in psychology—as far as their friends and acquaintances are concerned, only at the marriage partner do they look through rosy glasses. This attitude is the result partly of an infantile approach to reality, partly of psychic masochism, present in everybody to a different degree. Marriage is for adult people; neurotic marriage partners are inwardly immature and rather naive children.

Infantile expectations, coupled with ignorance of the partners unavoidable ambivalence, represent a duality on which a great deal of marital misery rests.

6. *Lack of privacy.* "The worst thing in marriage is the constant necessity of being always with the same person"—that is the considered opinion of many dissatisfied couples.

It is true that at times all married people want to get off by themselves temporarily; and reasonable couples amicably make the necessary arrangements. The neurotics who complain about the lack of privacy in marriage, however, refer to something else. When they speak of "being always with the same person," they mean "being under the supervision of the educator." Once more, it is the child, protesting against supervision. It cannot be repeated often enough that marriage is a workable institution exclusively for adult people.

7. *Sexual conflicts.* "Marriage," complained a lady in analysis because of frigidity, "is the graveyard of sex."

"How can something die which was never alive in your case?" I objected.

"Oh, I had beautiful fantasies about sex," retorted the lady indignantly.

"That's the point: your sex-life has always been restricted to fantasy, hence neurotically confined to unreality."

"You are mistaken; my sex was killed in marriage."

"Your husband and you reported in nearly identical terms that you had the fantastic notion that sex 'diminishes beauty,' hence should be sparingly used. That idea spells lack of interest, in other words frigidity."

"How am I responsible for the fact that dirty marital sex doesn't match the beautiful expectations I had as a girl?"

"Your expression betrays you. What's dirty about marital sex? By making it a four-letter word, you hide your neurotic inability to enjoy sex in the first place."

"Sex is manure."

"Only for neurotics."

"I disagree."

"Of course you do. That's a symptom and sign of your sickness."

The sex-is-manure theory has its masculine upholders too. Another woman put it this way:

"Men are dirty swine, if you want my honest opinion. They try to use a woman only as a prostitute. No tenderness, no romantic build-up, just brutal and uncouth release of tension."

The manure theory, held by either partner, produces

frigidity in women, pseudo-brutality in men. Both are symptoms and signs of a neurotic approach.

Next in the list of neurotic sexual attitudes comes the "resignation attitude." It looks something like this:

A male patient: "Sex in marriage seems to run the following cycle: First you overrate it, then you don't know how to get out of the situation gracefully, later it becomes a duty which you want to shirk, finally it changes into an unachievable requirement."

A female patient: "Sex is a masculine invention to annoy women. I submit with resignation. Nothing can be done about it—it is a part of the suffering marriage imposes upon wives."

Somewhere in between the manure and resignation theories is the *forbidden-fruit* attitude. A male patient once put it this way: "Sex dies in marriage after a few short years; that's a natural development. There's nothing to be worried about in marital impotence; all my friends agree that they, too, have lost sexual interest in their wives. The incentive of conquering the woman fades, and that's exactly the stimulus you need. It's only natural that you should run after some 'babe,' while your wife leaves you cold. That's life; nothing can be done about it."

That alibi, which has a corresponding feminine edition, too, rests on a neurotic basis. These neurotics never grew up as far as sex is concerned. As children, they built up the equation: sex = the forbidden. That equation is solved in normal cases, but neurotics cling to it unconsciously, with resultant impotence or frigidity in marriage.

The results are tragic for men and women alike. In women, it leads to a change of lovers every few weeks or

months; in men to expendable extra-marital affairs. Both marriage partners, ignorant of the neurotic basis of promiscuity, inwardly accuse one another or build up the convenient theory that loss of sexual desire is inescapable in marriage. Sometimes their ignorance takes them one step further: they divorce each other and marry the lover and mistress, respectively. Then, as in the previous marriage, after a short time sex dies out.

The "forbidden-fruit" theory is the most efficient mass-killer of marriages. Statistically, no other reason rates so high in divorce as infidelity. And infidelity is the typical result of that fallacy.

Freud once made the remark that sex impressed him as a dying function. The amount of frigidity and impotence in present day society justifies that pessimistic assumption. There are no statistics available; all attempts at compiling them are handicapped by people's unwillingness to admit painful facts and by the naiveté of the interviewers. The statistical impressions gained by unprejudiced observers are tragically high: they estimate that eighty-ninety percent of the women are frigid, and thirty-forty percent of the men suffer from various forms of impotence.\*

8. *An unfavorable ratio of duty to fun.*

"Marriage," complained a woman patient, "is but a sum of duties to be performed without joy."

"The trick is obviously to do what one has to do without much complaint and to enjoy the pleasures of com-

\* These estimates are at variance with Kinsey's statistics. The reason is simple enough; Kinsey denies in biologic onesidedness the existence of the most frequently encountered disturbances: premature ejaculation and lack of vaginal orgasm. His anti-psychiatric bias plays a trick on Kinsey.

panionship with a magnifying glass," was my answer.

The woman became highly indignant and claimed that as a "realistic" person she was incapable of living on the basis of illusions.

"Nobody lives on the basis of constant emotional perception of the unpleasantness of life. Everybody colors the facts, magnifying his pleasures, minimizing his tragedies."

The patient was even more indignant: "That's psychic falsification of facts."

"You are partly right; that's just what we all do. Why not ask yourself whether your pessimistic philosophy is not simply an alibi for a depression stemming from other sources?"

"That's a trick; you just shift the problem."

"We are subjectively not concerned with the objective tragedy and misery of life. These facts are subjectively unchangeable. Shortness of life, relative lack of success, sickness, death, are facts which we have to accept. Normally we don't think about all that; there seem to be forces in the ego which counteract that self-torture. We are suspicious of the prophets of doom. Our problem is obviously to have some pleasure within the framework of what is biologically and socially subjectively achievable. Your criticism of marriage is unjustified and neurotic. How do you account for the fact that companionship in marriage is so highly valued?"

"By idiots only."

"You are wrong. Marriage is admittedly an imperfect institution, but still the best available."

My patient exclaimed triumphantly: "You admit then that marriage is a dismal failure?"

"Nothing of the kind. The difficulties of marriage are mostly caused by irrational expectations. In a convenient shift, the expectations are discarded and the institution of marriage indicted."

"You cannot deny the fact that marriage means nothing but duties, pretenses, lies, and acting satisfied when one would like to scream and cry with unhappiness."

"You overlook the fact that marriage is exactly what marriage partners make out of it. If you put stagnant water into a pitcher, you cannot exactly blame the pitcher for its contents. If your neighbor puts delicious wine into an identical pitcher, the result is different."

"The comparison is senseless: the pitcher is unusable from the start—to continue your simile."

"I beg to differ. How do you explain the fact that there are happy marriages?"

"That's exactly what I definitely deny. There ain't any such animal."

"It is obvious that you generalize to find an alibi for your own unhappy marriage. There are happy marriages; the question is only what one understands by that term. Happiness in marriage does not mean a perpetual fiesta. It is the sum of thousands of situations: if the balance sheet shows basic contentment, one has reasons to call such a marriage a happy one."

"Do you apply statistical methods as a yardstick?"

"It can't be measured statistically, of course. I refer to basic contentment, to the feeling of the two marriage partners that, despite all transitory conflicts, they need each other, trust each other, and love each other, if you don't object to so old-fashioned a term."

"Words, nothing but words. What world do you live in? Do your patients teach you such nonsense?"

"My patients are neurotics who have tried for twenty years to convince me of the truth of your philosophy."

"You are just stubborn, or more likely, you pretend to believe your baloney of happy marriages for business reasons. Take a patient who complains about his unhappy marriage. You deduce from that that he's neurotic and advocate analysis. Good business for you, I must say. If you were honest, you would say: 'That's only natural, marriage is a mess.' But where then would your business of repairing unhappy marriages be?"

"Would you," I asked my patient, "also advise a specialist in syphilis to send away his patients with the consoling statement that syphilis is the natural state of affairs? There are countries whose population is ninety percent syphilitic, you know."

"Still specious. Syphilis is a disease, marital misery the result of a stillborn institution."

"That stillborn institution, as you ironically call it, serves humanity well—provided neurosis does not interfere."

This patient's furious deduction is one often made by neurotics who mess up their marriages. Especially frequent is the argument that "marriage is but a sum of duties to be performed without joy," coupled with a general debunking of marriage as an institution. The ratio of duty to fun is found wanting.

No attitude has less foundation in reality. Take as an example cooking or the supervision of cooking. One woman sees in it only a chore; another thinks about the expression of childish pleasure on her husband's face



when he is presented with his favorite dish. Vice versa: one husband may feel neurotically that he works himself to the bone for "that parasite" of a wife; another thinks about the comforts his work affords his wife and himself.

It all depends on "how you feel about it," to quote one patient. The real trouble is that neurotics never grow up psychically and react even to harmless reality factors in the same way they did when as children they were told to stop some game and prepare their schoolwork.

9. *Lack of opportunity to act irrationally.* The most abstruse objection leveled against marriage is that it forces one "to act rationally."

This is the declaration of a man in treatment: "I told you that I love my wife and I mean it. But besides the little things that infuriate me in my wife, I have an objection to marriage which sometimes comes to the fore with amazing strength; it makes me, at such times frantically unhappy. The objection is so foolish that I have never discussed it with my wife; I cover up my bad humor with some excuse. What I object to is—well, the earth-bound quality of marriage. What I mean is this: during my working hours I am bound to act rationally. And at home I have to act the same way—and that's what hurts. Sometimes I would just like to be irresponsible—act like a fool if I feel like it. I'd like to be able to express foolish opinions, leave my work, obligations, duties, without being confronted with my wife's justified objections, which I make to myself anyway. There are times when I'd like to shake free of the rules of common sense, be unreasonably unjust toward people, wallow in self-pity or anger. But if I start to carry out any of these irrational wishes, my wife looks at me in surprise; I have to correct

my senseless statements, and the fun of being irresponsible is spoiled."

A woman patient complained: "I've figured out why marriage is such an imperfect institution: it works too much on the level of reality. It caters too much to the adult standard of the person. What about the child in us? If I'm in a bad mood, my husband asks first what he has done, then proves that I'm hysterical. I never really can let my hair down, do you know what I mean?"

Another woman: "Marriage has its advantages, but there's too much stern reality about it. The dreamy and silly part in us is not taken care of. When I'm feeling like that, my husband asks: 'What's eating you now?' How am I to know—perhaps I am not rational enough for that terribly grown-up institution? Some of the dreamy part in me finds an outlet in fantasies centering around adventure stories and novels I read—it has nothing to do with sex\*—but that's a poor substitute. The freedom of the bird is missing."

This keenly felt lack of the irrational element in marriage is universal, though seldom openly expressed. Such moods—remnants of the childhood revolt against the enforced "reality principle," the successor of the "pleasure principle" of the nursery, beset everybody. Only if these moods are too predominant is an argument against marriage built up. Marriage also represents reality—and it is in this instance the victim of a nursery rebellion.

The complaint has its paradoxical aspect. Most neurotic marriages are based on the repetition of unconscious

\* The patient was not precise in her formulation: some of her "dreams" were disguised sexual fantasies and belonged in the category of "missed opportunities." Others really pertained to the consciously missed pleasure of irrationality.

fantasies and defenses—undoubtedly something irrational. Of that, the participants are completely unaware. It shows the Babelian confusion of language, which is neither made for nor suited to the discussion of unconscious mechanisms. What those who complain of the lack of irrationality in marriage mean, is something else again. They mean: "consciously experienced irrationality." "The freedom of the bird is missing." Old though never relinquished fantasies of omnipotence are hinted at.

10. *The scapegoat theory.* To understand effectively the part played by reality factors in life demands a higher degree of normal adaptation than the majority of people ever achieve. This emotional blindness, as it were, preserves intact remnants of the baby philosophy that everything "bad" is the result of external malice, everything "good" the result of one's own omnipotence.

In marriage, the results are far-reaching. Wife and husband, directly and indirectly, blame each other for all misfortunes. It is tragi-comic to observe to what an amazing degree facts are distorted in order to place blame on the marriage partner.

A woman complained: "My husband blames me for things which by no stretch of imagination are connected with me. If he has a quarrel with his partner, he blames me. When I ask him where I come in, he says that if he weren't burdened with family obligations he wouldn't have expanded his business. When he's unsuccessful in some business venture, he blames me, again. Here his reasoning is that if his heavy family burden didn't drain him, he wouldn't be so nervous. His behavior reminds

me of the old saying: If a stone falls from the roof of a house in China, it hits me in New York . . ."

A husband complained: "I'm the scapegoat for all possible misfortunes which can possibly happen to my wife. The illogicality of her arguments is just below the level of those a school girl would use. She firmly believes that somebody must be responsible, and this somebody is not she. To tease her, I once asked her what in her opinion was the connection between the Empire State Building, the moon, and a jazz band. She said that I was an idiot. I answered: 'Not at all, there is a clear-cut connection between all three: A jazz band plays in moonlight before the Empire State Building . . .' That's the way you connect events to make me responsible for everything."

The formula is simple: under normal conditions, husband and wife identify with each other's troubles. Under abnormal conditions they are used as scapegoats although their actual connection with the circumstance for which they are blamed is no greater than the connection between the Empire State Building, the moon, and a jazz band . . .

11. *Children as battleground.* The problem of children in happy and unhappy marriages is widely ramified and cannot be discussed in a few words\* Unfortunately, parents too frequently forget that children have personalities and rights of their own, and regard children as part of their own ego. As a result, the child is damaged psychologically, and the parents unavoidably disappointed.

The situation is especially tragic when parents drag

\* See *Divorce Won't Help*, Chapter IX, "The Illusory Basis of Divorce."

their children into their private conflicts and battles. By forcing the child to "take sides," they increase his inner conflicts, conflicts which are present independent of parental interference.

12. *Changes of the neurotic repertoire.* In general, one can state that the number of unconscious wishes can be counted on the fingers of one hand. The defensive disguises, however, are innumerable, and consequently the possible variations of the neurotic repertoire are well-nigh inexhaustible.

The whole concept of marriage as a cage\* and the feeling that women trick men into marriage is abstruse.† It is not by chance that this concept was put into words by a man who was himself neurotically afraid of marriage, as Swift was. How can a voluntarily accepted pact be described as a prison? What it amounts to is simply once more a manifestation of masculine passivity, making out of the woman the aggressor. The inner necessity to deny objective facts, coupled with the wish to appear the victim, allows these men to overlook the fact that by complaining of feminine trickery, they make themselves out to be gullible idiots! That they take in their stride—once more an acceptance of the lesser evil!

\* The definition of Jonathan Swift.

† Many neurotic women also feel that marriage is a cage, or prison, and that men are the jailers.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### The Frightened League Against Chivalry and Woman's Equality

THE relationship between the sexes is at present in a period of transition—between the full emancipation of women and man's smoldering rebellion against that emancipation. The typical man is on the defensive. He no longer dares to fight the "arrogance of these women who believe that they are more important than men." Officially, he concedes full partnership to the "weaker sex," but retaliates inwardly with irony, scorn, and a feeling of "righteous indignation." Sometimes he even develops a "martyr complex" and paraphrases the ironic statement: "The American business man leaves in the morning for his home, his office."

I once asked a neurotic patient who was complaining about his wife's "tyranny" why his wife "mistreated" him so consistently. "Well," was his reply, "you seem to have Continental ideas about marriage. In this country the husband wears his wedding ring, not on his finger but through his nose." The man mistook his personal neurotic wish to suffer, indicated by the fact that he allowed himself to be married by a neurotically aggressive woman, for a general human trend. To listen to these neurotic

husbands, one would believe that the old Egyptian slavery had been re-established in modern marriage.

The facts are quite different. The emancipation of women from their ridiculous and degrading position as second-rate human beings is a refreshing and heartening development. In no other country of Western civilization has this emancipation progressed as far as in the United States, and nowhere else are the achievements of women so impressive. Nowhere else has the myth of masculine superiority been more thoroughly debunked.

Full inner acceptance of the equal rights of women presupposes a remodeling of unconscious, that is, irrational, factors in the male psyche. This is impossible as long as women are ignorant of the neurotic reasons for men's refusal to accept them on an equal basis. Time and again in discussions with men I have found how hopeless it is to convince them of feminine equality. Officially they accept it, only to contradict themselves the next moment by their irrational resentment.

The real reason for man's fight against feminine equality has an unconscious basis; to accept someone as an equal presupposes inner balance and sureness of oneself. The typical male, however, lives emotionally on shaky grounds. His hoax of being a he-man compensates poorly for his inner passivity. Confronted with woman on an equal footing, he-man feels his house of cards in danger of collapsing. Hence his emotional rejection of woman's equality.

A special bone of contention is the requirement of gallantry and chivalry. It is generally acknowledged in our culture that the man has to "behave" in a woman's presence. He has to act his best, be a "gentleman." Used

in this sense, the term implies that he must treat woman as someone to whom special respect and consideration are due. He must not sit till the woman is seated; he must refrain from profane language; he must do all the dirty work; he must wait on the woman, pick up things she lets fall; he must order for her first in a restaurant; he must ask for and pay the bills; in walking with her in the street he must assume a certain protective position and carry her packages; he must run after the things she wants or forgets—in short, he must be gallant. Gallantry came into being at a time when men were considered the stronger, women the weaker sex. It was a tribute to and compensation for alleged feminine weakness and inequality.

Time, however, marches on, and women have achieved full equality. But—and that “but” weighs heavily—the old code of gallantry has remained a social dictum. The result is that what was originally a voluntary masculine tribute to supposed feminine weakness has become a payment exacted for a condition that no longer exists. “You can’t have both: full equality and the advantages of full inequality,” claims the rebellious man. “If you’re a gentleman,” replies the woman, “you cling to gallantry whether or not woman officially has all civic rights.”

This impasse has never been solved and results in constant inner conflicts. The demand that a man act like a gentleman increases his feeling of being cheated in the relationship between the sexes. He already has the idea that women are parasites, and on top of that he is required to treat them as goddesses. Woman for her part, is conscious of the masculine rebellion, and is readily offended if she is not treated both as an equal and as a



"lady." The satirist Sinclair Lewis summed up the situation from the extreme masculine point of view. The *New York Times* for Nov. 20, 1941, reviewing his lecture "Has Modern Woman Made Good?" wrote:

Mr. Lewis felt that a man should be able to talk to a woman on any subject without the woman's interrupting with the reminder, "I am a lady." In answer to a question from the floor later, he gave his definition of a lady as "a woman so incompetent as to have to take refuge in a secluded clan, like kings and idiots who have to be treated with special kindness because they can't take it."

Men often express the feeling that "these women" expect "to have their equality cake and eat it, too, sugared with gallantry."

Instead of understanding the nature of his own ambivalent feelings toward woman, man bolsters his crumbling defenses with various rationalizations. High on the list of these is woman's "mysterious nature."

For centuries poets and painters and philosophers alike have tried in vain to solve the riddle of woman, only to achieve for answer at best a Mona Lisa smile. Torn between the assumption and the denial that woman is a mystery, philosophers have formulated simple but impressive contradictions:

Kant: "Woman does not divulge her secret."

Nietzsche: "Man thinks woman profound—why? Because he can never fathom her depths. Woman is not even shallow."

In the analytic "search for the obvious"—for the sources of this attitude—we can be guided by the following facts:

1. *Biologic reasons.* The female anatomy is an un-

solved riddle for the male child. It is part of the problem of sex in general and shrouded in mystery. Especially are the functions of menstruation and childbirth frightening and at the same time inexplicable to the boy. His fright and wonder, projected into the psychologic field, forms one of the cornerstones of the mystery surrounding women.

2. *Psychologic reasons.* In later life the male child's dependence on the mother is reversed, through unconscious identification with the mother. The child in adult's clothes marvels at his fantastic reversal, and does not believe inwardly that his hoax has succeeded. That mirage, too, is projected, and women become even more "mysterious."

3. *The propaganda motive.* Every time a man refers to the mystery surrounding woman, he is inferring that she is irrational, senseless, illogical, and undependable. In other words, he unconsciously uses her alleged mystery also as a weapon of self-defense.

4. *The factor of "difference."* Man in general has one simple yardstick—himself. Everything different is either frightening or "bad." His childlike megalomania prevents him from comprehending anything outside the realm of his own super-inflated ego. I once heard a story about an African explorer who played a Caruso record on his victrola for a native chieftain. "Don't you feed your singers?" asked the chieftain. "Why does this man shout so loud?" In other words, African music is *different*.

5. *Fear of being "seen through."* Many men feel uncomfortable in the company of a woman until they have established their superiority in a specific field. The stock-broker wants to talk about the market, the engineer

about his latest construction, the physician about an "interesting case," and so forth. If a woman looks at a man quizzically, as if sizing him up, he feels that he is undergoing a potency examination. On a deeper unconscious level his thought is: "She will see through my defense mechanism." Amusingly enough, the same feeling besets the man who considers himself a "seducer." The moment a woman fails to succumb to his blandishments, he becomes the rejected little boy, though he wards off this feeling with aggression or irony or indifference.

6. *Unconscious self-doubt.* Men often have a slight inner doubt of their mastery—whether, of themselves, they have really "conquered" the woman. This doubt is justified, since as we have already observed, a woman makes her decision long before the man has recognized his own interest in her. Man's doubt, normally repressed, has its surface reverberations in the feeling that something mysterious, beyond his control, is going on. This feeling, too, contributes to the "mystery" of woman.

In addition to being mysterious, women are, so men claim, illogical and contradictory creatures. Here is a typical masculine complaint: "My wife has no logic at all—worse, she is not impressed with a logical conclusion. She changes facts to her liking. Some people would use the ugly word 'liar.' She isn't rational in her shopping—she's a typical bargain hunter. When I try to restrain her, she evades the issue and says that I don't treat her like a lady. How often have I been told, 'You can't talk that way to a lady'! When she complains about me she doesn't elaborate just on my specific 'crime.' No, she has to drag in the whole past. When I'm late from the office

because of work, she goes into a tirade about all of my misbehaviors since the day we met. According to her, my only purpose in life is to disappoint her. She has no conception of reality as it is. When she sends me to the ration board after closing hours, giving me the wrong information about the hours, and I can't speak to the official, she accuses me of incompetence. I don't remember the 'logic' of her arguments, but she managed to bawl me out when the newspaper wasn't delivered because of the delivery strike. I'm just a wastebasket for all of her complaints about life in general. She's a chatterbox when she should be listening to me, and half asleep when I want her opinion. Sometimes she makes me feel that I have an enemy in my home. If I try to show her how unreasonable her behavior is, she gets hysterical and cries."

What is at the bottom of this and similar complaints? Female disrespect for logic is their common denominator. Logic is the working method of our consciousness. It is true that the intelligent man has an exaggerated respect for logic and common sense. If you prove to a man that he has acted illogically, he is ashamed. Unconsciously he feels that he has been exposed and "castrated." If you prove the same thing to a woman, she is unimpressed. Does that mean that she is illogical? Not at all. It simply means that she is intuitively clever enough to refuse to submit to a set of rules that does not give her an edge. Men for centuries have made women out to be children. ("She's just a baby.") Women laugh at this inwardly, but take all the prerogatives offered them by this maculine nonsense. They know only too well that the illusion gives them power and at the same time pro-

vides men with a much-needed feeling of superiority. For their part, men enjoy, through unconscious identification with women's "childishness," their own repressed infantilism, though they complain consciously about their dreary fate. The whole procedure is simply a game *a deux* for achieving specific ends.

When it comes down to hard facts, women are better adapted to reality than are men,\* with all their overestimated logic, which by no means regulates their lives. Actually, women have more common sense than men. They have a clearer vision of reality, are less confused by "ideas." Getting down to brass tacks—that is the woman's strong point, though her force lies not in formulations.

It is not even true that we can generalize about woman's illogicality. The modern woman has a very precise evaluation and command of logic—if she cares to use it.

\* Stressing man's immaturity does not imply denial of feminine neuroticism. Whims, scenes, weeping, sulking, petty malice, all these and similar paraphernalia of infantile women have been described in thousands of novels and experienced by millions of men. They are augmented by women's refusal to be influenced by "logic."

## CHAPTER NINE

### Precautions and Remedies

I WILL say once again that there are no short cuts to the elimination of neuroses. A neurosis once established is unchangeable—except by psychiatric treatment. There are, however, all degrees of neurosis. In “smaller cases,” diminution (not elimination!) of conflict can be achieved by knowing what it is all about. True enough, *intellectual* understanding never substitutes for *affective* understanding. The latter can be achieved only in psychiatric therapy. Only the latter has a curative effect. Still, a small loaf is better than no loaf at all.

The idea that marriage is a form of captivity is harbored only by neurotic children in adult guise who never adjusted to the idea of maternal (paternal) supervision. Inwardly they still act the victim, projecting their defensive anger upon their mates.

Objectively, the emotional factors pushing a girl and boy into marriage are identical. Nevertheless man still acts as if he were a prisoner, the implication being that his pre-marital life was an unbroken record of joy!

Neurotic misogynists have shown with “irrefutable mathematics” that marriage does not pay. To quote Schopenhauer:

In our part of the world where monogamy is the rule, to marry means to halve one's rights and double one's duties . . . For the institution of monogamy, and the laws of marriage which it entails, bestow upon the woman an unnatural privilege, by considering her throughout as the full equivalent of the man, which is by no means the case; and seeing this, men who are shrewd and prudent very often scruple to make so great a sacrifice and to acquiesce in so unfair an arrangement. ("On Women.")

Still, men continue to marry. The irrationality of "rationality" applied where it does not apply (to an emotional problem) becomes apparent.

The basic psychic masochism of those who feel that marriage is slavery is illustrated by the grievances of a patient who said:

"I get up at 7:30 in the morning. My wife is, of course, asleep. I wash, shave, and dress and have the choice of getting my breakfast myself or going to a drugstore. I prefer the latter since I dislike washing my dishes, and if I leave them to my wife or the maid she gives me a long song and dance about how selfish I am. Another reason I leave home so early is that I'd have to fix her breakfast, too, if I stayed. What does she take me for—a servant? If I can't wait till she finishes, she complains about my selfishness in not keeping her company. If I want to read the newspaper, and I have to, for business reasons, the same dance starts all over again—I'm selfish and uninterested in her. In the drugstore I have my quiet half-hour. True, I don't like their coffee and I hate to be pushed around, but I console myself that as a bachelor I was in the same position. Well, I don't pursue that train of thought—what did I marry her for anyway?"

"In the office I feel free till my wife calls, as she usually

does, either to complain about something—mostly money—she asks for more than I want to give—or to ask me to buy something. So my secretary has something to do. I even have to swallow the ironical and pitying look she gives me—as if to say: ‘Well, if you had married me this wouldn’t have happened to you.’ Of course I’m wise to the whole species; she would have been even worse than my wife.

“Lunchtime with the boys is not bad; they’re real company. They all joke about their slavery and brag about their girl friends. I just shudder. Two women, by God! I have enough trouble with one. My impression, though, is that my friends take it for granted that wives are a burden, and treat them as they would the collector of internal revenue. In the evening I go home. When I say ‘go’ I mean I travel forty minutes.

“At home I find a tired parasite. If you were to listen to her you’d think that she worked and I enjoyed life. Dinner, too, is a disappointment: my wife seldom orders dishes I really like. She rejects all my favorites as ‘barbaric.’ After dinner I am disgusted, angry and tired. As soon as she finds that I’m tired and want to rest, she’s fresh and adventurous. ‘Why, the day’s just started, darling. Let’s have some fun. Did you forget we’re going to the movies with the Joneses?’ To hell with the Joneses, to hell with everything, I prefer my easy chair. If I protest she starts a long tirade about her ‘boring life.’ So better to keep smiling till twelve. In the meantime a few drinks help.

“Bedtime is the last hazard of the day: I’m sure that I made a few tactless remarks at the Joneses, even if I don’t know what they were. Well, my education seems never



**MARITAL CAPTIVITY**

to end. And in bed? If I make some advances I'm a brute since I misbehaved so badly just before, and must listen then to reminiscences of my alleged miserliness, etc. If I don't, I'm just a 'tired old man' out of circulation. The worst part of the whole thing is that I don't believe she really enjoys sex. She just uses it as a weapon against me. She likes to drain me.

"I think it's just a woman's world and men are suckers. I furthermore believe that the word 'woman' is spelled wrong; it should be 'woe-man.'"

What is wrong with this man? First of all, he is a neurotic who unconsciously likes being mistreated. Therefore he allowed himself to be chosen by a frigid shrew who exploits him and tyrannizes him. He feels constantly "drained," and regards all requests for money, attention, company, sex as exploitation, not realizing that when people love or at least like each other, these things are not a burden but a pleasure. True, this pleasure is attainable only under one condition: unconscious identification with a "giving" person. And the first giving person with whom one has contact is one's mother.

Psychologically, giving money implies more than just the offering of a scrap of paper in the form of a dollar bill or a check. In the unconscious it means: "I give." A person who leaves the period of babyhood with the feeling that he has not been given enough has an inclination to refuse thereafter. However, his "refusal" is not a simple reaction, nor is it simple in development. For instance, if he wants to refuse simply to repeat alleged childhood disappointments, why should he marry at all? With or without shouting he must give in the end. One might argue that in order to reverse the infantile situation he

must have a partner, but if so why should he marry a woman, or more precisely, allow himself to be married by, a woman as aggressive as my patient described his wife as being? Here we get an inkling of the fact that masochistic, self-damaging tendencies are involved, too. Clinical experience has proved time and again that this is so. There is no direct transition between "I was once refused" and "I am the refuser now." Between the two a neurotic elaboration has taken place. Logically the process is quite inconceivable. Neurotics not only misuse the situation of alleged refusal for masochistic pleasure but, as previously explained, throughout their lives create situations in which they are refused. The man last quoted lost a fortune more than once by unwise speculations. He made of the stock exchange the bad, mistreating mother.

Such neurotics, completely unaware that their misfortunes are self-provoked, see only the "terrible injustice" of the outer world, which they fight with all the aggression at their disposal, seemingly in self-defense and with "righteous indignation." After this show of "self-defense," which in general proves unsuccessful, they behave like little children sulking in the corner, and pity themselves inordinately. Thus they enjoy once more, unconsciously, psychic masochistic pleasure.

Obviously, the man quoted above cannot be helped by the "precautions and remedies" for home consumption which were outlined in an earlier chapter. His self-damaging tendencies could be changed, and have been, as a matter of fact, only by prolonged psychiatric-psychanalytic treatment.

Men constantly complain about the power women have "usurped" in the last half-century; and there are, as

psychologically trained observers have repeatedly pointed out, historic and psychologic reasons for the great increase of feminine power in this particular country. In an originally colonial country women were once rare and valued. Later, pioneer women had, indirectly, a higher cultural standard; they kept the "home fires burning." The husband was kept in a state of bad conscience not so much by his wife as by the rigid puritanical mores of the community as a whole. Attitudes which included deprecation of liquor, bad language, and above all sex, which even in marriage was represented as "dirty" and half-forbidden, all helped to force the male into a more submissive, because more guilt-laden, role in relation to his wife. Nothing really new was added by the grant of legal equality to women. Actually they were always the power behind the throne. But with changing times, the real—this is, the inner—balance of power became outwardly apparent.

Another important reason for female ascendancy in this country is the prevalence of women teachers in schools. The wife in many a marriage has become the third in the direct line of "authoritative" women in the man's life, the first two being mother and teacher. The triad of authority—mother, female teacher, and wife—is in the unconscious of many men an indivisible unit.

To what degree wife and mother are unconsciously one and the same person is visible also in the fact that both are "preparers" of food. The cooking or at least the ordering of the meals at home is the woman's duty. Thus "feeding" becomes an important link in this unconscious identification.

The whole problem of marital power is not under-

standable without an analysis of the unconscious reasons for which a man allows himself to be married by a woman. It is not necessary to go as far as George Bernard Shaw, who sees a conspiracy of "snares, traps, gins, and pitfalls for the capture of men by women," to acknowledge the fact that marriage is socially more advantageous for women than it is for man. When a man has extra-marital "affairs," the smartly neurotic set considers him a man-about-town or man of the world or at worst, a wolf. When a woman does so, she acquires the reputation of being a tramp. A woman who has an illegitimate child is beyond the pale. But a man can offset any stigma attaching to his illegal parenthood by contributing to his offspring's support. A spinster is considered slightly ridiculous or at least pathetic. The bachelor, on the other hand, is usually regarded as "too smart to be caught," and his neurosis is graciously overlooked. All this shows that the equality of women does not yet go so far as to grant her equal rights to neuroticism.

However, every normal man, as well as every normal girl, wants to get married. Why? The inner reasons have already been stressed: Every child goes through the period of the "oedipus complex" between the ages of 2 and 5, when the boy identifies with his father, the girl with her mother. And in the cultural family there are one father and one mother, and they are married. Thus, we see, strange as it may sound, the predisposition for marriage is acquired in the nursery. It follows then, that however great the social advantages of marriage for women, an even more powerful psychologic motive pushes men and women equally into marriage. All men's protests that they didn't want to marry are rationaliza-

tions, without inner foundation. Their decision to marry as we have already seen was formed in the nursery, though they are not aware of this.

The oedipal situation itself—the wish for exclusive love, with the resultant tendency to be jealous—accounts for some of the complications in marriage. A third person immediately activates the triangular oedipal situation which the child wants to escape. The less neurotic a person is the less jealous he is; he is mated to a normal woman who has the ability to concentrate lovingly on one man—her husband. However, remnants of infantile conflicts are like the dead heroes of Homer, who were resuscitated upon drinking blood. No one is above jealousy; only the quantitative factor differentiates normality from neurosis.



PART IV

MARRIAGE—

A WORKABLE

INSTITUTION





## CHAPTER TEN

### The Enemies of Marriage

WHATEVER their rationalization, people who avoid marriage "on principle" are neurotics with undigested inner conflicts. The "overaged bachelor" and the "garçonne" prove that dictum conclusively.

Women are sometimes confronted with the problem of middle-aged men who shy away from marriage. Apparently believing that sheer persistence will wear out the recalcitrant rebel, they invest great energy and ingenuity in trying to reform these noncandidates for marriage. The question arises, however, whether even if in some specific case the resistance to marriage can be overcome, the woman has made a good bargain. The problem cannot be understood unless one first acquaints oneself with the psychology of that type.

The overaged bachelor is baffling to the woman who erroneously assumes that his decision not to marry is freely made and hides some forbidden technique of enjoying life. Only this assumption explained why so many women, even when completely unconcerned, feel such a deep and rather aggressively tinged satisfaction in witnessing the capitulation of a confirmed bachelor. Some women claim that a bachelor, by simply existing, endangers the institution of marriage and the power of

woman. "It gives husbands something to think about," said one woman indignantly.

The last person of whom to ask the reasons for his decision not to marry is, of course, the bachelor himself. He has a series of stock answers: no time, no opportunity, poor financial condition, and similar not too intelligent rationalizations. Another group rants about "cruel women" who take advantage of the "sucker" of a husband, betray his confidence, make him a cuckold, and so on.

The clinical fact is that all these bachelors are serious neurotics with specific fears which make them avoid marriage. Secondly they cloak these unconscious fears in rationalizations, giving their bachelorhood the appearance of being a voluntary decision.

There are different types of overaged bachelors—hysterical, obsessional, oral, and perverted.

1. *The hysterical type of bachelor.* This is the variety most commonly encountered. Such a man has remained unconsciously on the oedipal level. For the hysterical bachelor, mother and prospective wife are unconsciously one and the same, and marriage is therefore to be avoided. The sex life of such a man centers around prostitutes or easy girl friends. With these women he can use the inner alibi, "Mother was an honorable woman; this harlot has nothing in common with her." Using this device, he can also, to some extent, unconsciously devalue the idealized mother. As a practical result of his oedipal fixation, his potency is preserved with women of the "devaluated" type but fails him with respectable women. The neurotic, "born" bachelor lives with this

neurotic compromise. Sometimes his compromise is not so extensive, and he is a lifelong masturbator.

The man of this type often lives with his mother, who treats him like a baby. Looking at this relationship with the analytical microscope, one soon discovers that not only repressed libidinous tendencies but also pseudo-aggressive ones are involved. He stays with his mother also as a defense against his inward aggression toward her (taking the blame for the lesser crime), for by so doing he proves to himself that she is still unharmed by his unconscious aggression.

What happens to these hysteric bachelors when they allow themselves to be pressed into marriage or even become engaged? Here are a few clinical examples:

A member of a large concern had become engaged, at the age of thirty-five, to a wealthy girl. The engagement had been entered into at his mother's wish and with great reluctance on his part. He had lived with his mother as a mother's boy, been potent with his "girl-friends," and led a "merry bachelor's life," as he called the period before his engagement. On the day his engagement was announced, however, a veritable pandemonium of symptoms set in. All of his organs rebelled. He suddenly suffered from headache, palpitation of the heart, diarrhea, urinary disturbances, profuse sweating, feelings of anguish and depression, disturbance of concentration, inability to work, and complete failure of potency.

After some sessions in analysis the treatment was interrupted by my vacation. When the patient returned in the fall, he presented himself as "cured." He had taken a "cold water cure" in a sanitarium and was enthusiastic about the result. He had, of course, broken his engage-

ment and resumed his "happy" former life. Naively, he was not aware that it was the latter circumstance that had effected his "cure." The main portion of his shortly interrupted analysis showed his strong libidinous attachment to his mother. He divided women into two groups—the respected images of his mother, sexually irreproachable (e.g., his prospective wife), and degraded women, with whom he was potent (Freud's "cleavage between sensual and tender components"). He confessed that his breakdown was the fourth he had experienced—"strangely enough," every time he became engaged! He decided to remain a bachelor, since marriage was "too much" for him.

A similar case was that of a man of forty-two who entered analysis because of a long string of hysterical-hypochondriacal complaints, mainly centered around his weak stomach. He worried constantly about his hiccoughs, peristalsis, and "regularity." He believed that his digestion was too weak for the strain of marriage. This strange statement was based on his observation that too frequent intercourse disturbed his bowels.

He lived with his mother until he was forty-one, when the old woman died. Their main topic of conversation was his poor health. He had (seldom enough) affairs with prostitutes which he engaged in for "hygienic reasons." He paid, he claimed, for these "excesses" with the deterioration of his digestion and the reproaches of his mother. Every time he had an exacerbation of his irregularity, his mother reprimanded him for "debauchery."

After his mother's death he felt lonely and attached himself to a widow in her forties. Conflict started immediately after marriage because his wife wanted to mod-

ernize his antiquated apartment, while he objected to the slightest change. He cloaked his arguments with the excuse that he was paying pious deference to his mother's memory. His wife, an energetic person, had no understanding of his objections and went ahead with her plans. The result was that his weak potency vanished altogether, the digestive tract being used once more as a rationalization.

The patient complained bitterly about his situation: "I considered my mother a rather tyrannical person: only in retrospect do I see that she was meek, at least compared with my wife. That's not life, it's a concentration camp . . ." Finally, he divorced her. Some time later he entered treatment because of his "nervous stomach." He had not the slightest understanding of the fact that his neurosis had any connection with his marital fiasco. "I'm just a born bachelor." Confronted with the objection that such a person does not exist, he replied that the exception proves the rule.

What grotesque consequences such unsolved mother fixations may have is shown also in the following case. An elderly businessman came to consult me with his young brother, who had just married. It seemed that after the wedding night, during which he had not even touched his wife, the groom had fled back to his mother and could not be prevailed upon to return to his wife. Though the marriage was a relief to his family and "financially profitable," the man "would not see reason," his brother complained indignantly. He was deaf to threats and logic. He stated that he was not afraid of his wife, as his brother said, nor was she unsympathetic toward him. He simply feared for his health, and had

returned to his mother in order to consult his physician, who lived nearby. He clung to this transparent rationalization in spite of his brother's scoffing. The psychoanalytic treatment his brother wanted him to have could not be arranged because his father-in-law, who was to pay the expenses, preferred to give up his son-in-law.

Sometimes the results are less grotesque and more tragic. We read repeatedly in the newspapers about men who on the day before marriage commit suicide. The reports usually stress the fact that there was seemingly no reason for his act, since the man had no financial worries and was "happily engaged." These cases escape even analysis; one can only suspect that motivations similar to those described in the previous examples are involved, especially since some of those patients admitted that in the height of their conflict they "seriously considered suicide," and two of them very nearly carried it out.

A more crucial consideration than these neurotics who "escape marriage" and thus preserve their precious neurotic balance are the overaged bachelors who do finally marry. What is the driving power behind their "desperate decision," to quote one such patient?

We have no reason to underestimate the driving power of the inner reproach: "a normal man marries." Even the institution of monogamy, so often ridiculed, has a powerful advocate in the superego. The simple fact remains that in the cultural family there is one father and one mother, and they are married. To repeat: since every child identifies in the oedipal period with the parent of the same sex, the cornerstones for the concept of marriage and monogamy are laid in the nursery.

Since these driving forces are present even in the early part of life, they cannot account for the belated decision of the old bachelor to marry. The simple but decisive fact is that every neurosis increases with age. In other words, the reason that some elderly men finally decide to marry is because they are bowing at last not to normality, as naive observers believe, but quite the contrary, to neurosis. They misuse marriage to repeat fully their childhood fixation, executing their neurotic repetition-repertoire on the marital stage. They bargain for higher stakes and get them.

Some of these neurotics are curable. The majority of them, however, avoid treatment.

2. *The obsessional type of bachelor.* To understand this type of neurotic bachelor demands specialized knowledge of the obsessional personality, which is too complex to be gone into here.

The main problem of these sick people are their fights with their superego, which accuses them of inner passivity. This they ward off with pseudo-aggression, which in turn is also forbidden. The obsessional neurotic, in my opinion, fights his battle on two fronts. Nearer to the psychic surface are his constant reproaches pertaining to his aggressions; he constantly believes himself guilty of damaging other people with "bad thoughts," to which he ascribes omnipotence, and considers himself a jinx. All his sexual ideas have an anal connotation which results in his considering sex "dirty, filthy, and beastly." The latter term points in the direction of compensatory sadistic ideas. Beneath this level lies deep masochistic regression. The feeling of guilt pertains, in my opinion, to these

masochistic tendencies, and are only secondarily shifted to the defense.

3. *Our old acquaintance: the injustice collector.*

This type of neurotic specializes in the "triad of orality." Here is a clinical example:

A patient consulted me in great desperation, complaining about the "Gordian knot of marriage." He had lived until the age of forty-five with his mother and his married sister; both women dominated his life, although he was not conscious of it. He was successful in his profession, and was the family provider. The family treated him with respect; he had a hard time proving that he was unjustly treated. He was, however, successful in this attempt.

First of all, he constantly blamed his mother and sister for his not having "a home." This reproach referred to the fact that he had never married. The truth was simple: he was afraid of marriage. In his conscious mind, however, he was victimized by his mother and sister. As long as his earning capacity was not too great, he had used the high cost of providing for "two households" as a rationalization for not marrying. Later, he earned so much that this argument became patently absurd, and he then used the excuse that there was no assurance against financial depression, and a consequent and substantial reduction of his income. In the meantime he considered himself the victim of his "greedy family."

It was astounding to what degree the man focused on collecting imaginary injustices. Mother and married sister treated him with kid gloves. Both depended on him; both tried hard to please him. He cancelled all this by constantly pointing out to them that they "didn't give a



damn" whether he was happy or not, they were only after his money. He was a bitter and unjust complainer.

His mother died in a car accident, and the patient remained with his sister. Quarrels intensified; he began to accuse her of "noticeable neglect." This went so far that the poor woman, who really tried hard to keep the wealthy brother at home and satisfied, lost patience and rebelled. The patient went into a depression, and decided to marry.

Consciously he had a very precise idea of what his future wife had to be like. First of all, he demanded "devotion, love, one hundred percent acceptance of my being the boss." He finally married one of his girl-friends, and "here the tragedy started." He admitted after a few weeks that he had been guilty of "making a wrong diagnosis." It turned out that his wife was neither devoted nor willing to accept him as boss. Quite the contrary, she was domineering and "stood for no nonsense." The result was that the man, unwilling to give his enemies reason to gloat by divorcing his wife, entered analysis.

Analysis could prove to him that his unhappy choice corresponded exactly to his unconscious wishes. The successful man had difficulties in grasping that he was, even unconsciously, a glutton for punishment. This he was, nevertheless, even to the extent of unconsciously creating sexual difficulties with his wife. These difficulties showed up first in a sense of depression, later in a disinclination to have intercourse, and finally in a specific form of potency disturbance, psychogenic aspermia ("refusal" of ejaculation).

The reason he married at all can be stated precisely. He did so because his neurosis had increased. He married,

not, as he believed, to have peace and comfort, but to enjoy neurotic disturbances and conflicts. His marriage did not cause the collapse of his neurotic equilibrium, maintained until he reached the early forties, but was the outward sign of its collapse.

4. Bachelorhood covering a perversion. In this category belong homosexuals, transvestitists, perverted exhibitionists, etc.

The overaged bachelor is not a free agent, deciding his own destiny. His neurosis does that job for him. He is a sick man who manages to maintain a certain amount of neurotic equilibrium as long as he does not marry. His aversion to marriage is a symptom of his neurosis, and at the same time, protection against the full force of his latent neurosis. The age at which this protective mechanism of protracted bachelorhood typically collapses is the early forties or fifties. The bachelor then marries because his neurosis has increased, not because he wants "at last" to do the normal thing. One gets the impression that the forties remind a person that his youth is ending, and his neurosis asks for a holiday in the form of exaggeration. The unhappy marriage achieved by such an individual is often accompanied by potency disturbances, the result of the collapse of his self-protective device. Such a man can be helped analytically, but only on condition that he understand that his neurosis is to blame for his difficulties, not his age, with its "habits of long standing." The majority of these sick people simply divorce their wives or retreat from marriage at the last moment and continue to enjoy their pre-marital neurosis.

There is little to add about the feminine counterpart

of the overaged bachelor: the *garçonne*. She, too, adduces a whole string of rationalizations for her decision to remain single. She, too, is a victim of her neurosis, whether she retires to the fantasy of "sex on my own terms," amounting to promiscuity, or escapes completely into the world of sexual fantasies.

The enemies of marriage do not contribute anything to the solution of the problem of why people marry. They are enemies of marriage because their specific neurosis forces them in that direction. Their rationalizations are easily seen through even by psychological laymen—much to the discomfort of the overaged bachelor and the *garçonne* who ask that their rationalizations be taken at face value.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### Marriage Is for Adult People

**A** NEUROTIC is psychologically never as old as his birth certificate indicates: he is somewhere between the ages of one and three. His I.Q. may be normal, his body healthy; he looks like an adult. Scratch the surface, however, and you find—psychic diapers.

Psychic diapers—that is his (or her) neurosis. Anachronistically, he (or she) clings to wishes, defenses, feelings of guilt which the adult adult has overcome at a tender age. But the *adult child* inwardly perpetuates them.

Psychologically speaking, adulthood presupposes the giving up of infantile and repressed fantasies and automatically connected guilt. Only if this process of renunciation is achieved can reality be viewed as reality. Adult children, called neurotics, do exactly the opposite: they cling unconsciously to these very fantasies and elaborate on the guilt masochistically. The result is that reality is not viewed as reality but as an unhappy hunting ground for infantile repetitions. Inwardly, hoping to achieve repressed aims, consciously these people always carry a chip on the shoulder. There is no avoidance of the bitter fact: unconscious pleasures are paid for with conscious unhappiness.

Neurotics go through the motions of adulthood and

land exactly where they started: in the nursery. They are but unconscious repetition-machines motivated by an uncanny tendency to repeat the end-result of the infantile conflict.\*

There are two horns to their dilemma: to repeat *with* or *without* understanding that an infantile conflict is involved. I imagine that the future will witness in increasing numbers the attitudes shown in the following case:

One day a married couple, both in their middle thirties, presented themselves in my office. After introducing themselves, the husband delivered the following speech, the result of long mutual deliberation and consent:

"We are both two solid people with completely idiotic conflicts. We love each other but still go with great regularity through the following cycle. After a few months of peace and quiet I become attached to some prostitute-type of girl and suffer hell because of her flightiness. I toy with the idea of leaving my wife and marrying the girl, but I feel guilty about it. My wife finds it out and is offended—justifiably, of course. After a long struggle I give up the affair with the girl. This has happened four times. To complicate matters, my wife has her cycle, too. She gets attached to someone way below her intellectually and socially—some low-class traveling salesman. Then she toys with the idea of leaving me. We've gone

\* There will always be people impatient with the slow process of medical science. They still quote gleefully Oliver Wendell Holmes, who said in 1860: "I firmly believe that if the whole *materia medica* as now used could be sunk to the bottom of the sea, it would be all the better for mankind—and all the worse for the fishes." (Address, Massachusetts Medical Society, May 30, 1860). In reality, medical-psychiatric progress in the last decades has been amazing. True, not all the facts are yet known. Still, psychoanalytic psychiatry has become a real therapy for neurotic ills.

through the same rigmarole a number of times, and we're fed up with all the lying, cheating, behind-the-back stuff in general and we've come to the conclusion that our repetitive idiocy, as we call it, must be abnormal. We decided to do what people in the future will do: they will use psychiatrists in the same matter-of-fact way that people now consult dentists."

After greeting the avant-garde of future generations, I wanted to know something about the timing of their present "conflicts."

"It's strange; it never happens simultaneously."

"You mean, it's a conflict on the conveyor-belt?"

"First, I behave foolishly, and my wife is unhappy. Then the roles are reversed."

Both husband and wife entered analysis.

The husband had the following family background: He loved and admired his father but knew little about his mother. She had left the patient's father when the boy was only three and a half years old.

"Do you remember her at all?"

"Vaguely. She was a beautiful woman, stylish and rather a grand-daine."

"Why did she leave her husband and child?"

"She fell in love with a musician. The whole story was never clearly explained to me. Father never spoke about it. He was a darling, though a melancholy person. I have the feeling that he never overcame the shock of Mother's leaving him. From what I could gather, my mother couldn't stand the dullness and boredom of a bourgeois existence. At least that was explained to me by her sister many years later."

"Did your mother ever try to get in contact with you?"

"No. My recollections of her are more or less confined to a few portraits which Father didn't remove from the apartment."

"What happened to her?"

"The musician left her and she committed suicide."

"When was all that?"

"Long ago. I heard it only many years later."

"How did your father explain your mother's leaving?"

"In his quiet way. I saw that he suffered. Her name wasn't mentioned in our house."

"Did you take sides?"

"I was one hundred per cent for Father. I hated Mother because she made Father suffer."

"Did your father remarry?"

"No, he didn't."

"What happened to him?"

"He died suddenly of a coronary attack eight years ago."

"When did you marry?"

"After Father's death. I took it hard, and felt very lonely. I reflected what a miserable life the poor man had really had. He lived a very melancholy existence after Mother left."

"What was the first impression your wife made on you?"

"I was fascinated with her poise and her air of breeding. I immediately fell in love."

"On the other hand, you have a queer attraction for what you call 'tramps.'"

"That's exactly what is incomprehensible to me."

The mystery was solved in the following reconstruction, made on the basis of his dreams. He harbored two

sets of images pertaining to his mother. The first was the image of a perfect lady—which accounts for his instantaneous love for his future wife. The second image was more complex: it pertained to his idea, long repressed, that his mother, by running away from his father, had degraded herself—become a “tramp.” In attaching himself to “tramps” he materialized an infantile fantasy of the oedipal period.

At this point the patient objected violently. “That’s impossible. That would be unloyal to Father. My whole life was based on loyalty to Father.”

“You are confusing conscious with unconscious reactions.”

“I still maintain that you must be mistaken. Why, my loyalty toward Father goes beyond the grave. For instance, I preserved his arrangement of the rooms and all the furniture.”

“A part of your loyalty could be inner guilt.”

“I don’t believe it.”

“How else do you explain your predilection for tramps?”

“I can’t explain that.”

“The story is even more fantastic. In running to tramps you identify with your mother. You leave your wife as your mother left her husband.”

“Isn’t there a slight mix-up of sexes?”

“Your irony is understandable. However, you overlook the fact that the unconscious compulsion to repeat actively an experience one has endured passively is stronger than the power of one’s later-acquired knowledge of sex-distinctions.”



The patient became moody and admitted a "strange fact" which he had originally wanted to conceal.

"I was ashamed to tell you. I started to mix up the lady and tramp types. I read in an old novel of the French writer Peladan about a bored husband who suggested to his wife that she pretend to be a prostitute on the street; and that he pick her up, pretending he'd never seen her. My wife objected, but gave in once, because she had a guilty conscience about her own escapades. The experience was so nerve-racking that I decided we'd better consult a psychiatrist."

"The whole story hinges on the fact that you still believe unconsciously that sex is forbidden and degrading. That's why forbidden sex has an attraction for you."

The wife entered analysis at the same time as her husband. She came from a higher middle class family. There had been wealth and culture in her father's family for three generations. She admired her father greatly, and was rather "indifferent" to her mother, or so she believed.

"How do you account for your fancy for traveling salesmen?"

"If I knew I wouldn't be here."

"Any suggestions?"

"None."

"Was your father faithful to your mother?"

"I doubt it. They had quarrels every time he traveled to the factory in Chicago. My mother always wanted to accompany him. Father refused."

"What happened during these trips?"

"Mother suspected some girls."

"Do you remember any specific quarrels?"

"Only the general attitude."

"What was your reaction?"

"Inwardly I sided with Father and thought, 'Why doesn't she leave him in peace?'"

In her dreams she was frequently seduced by a gangster.

"Could you describe him?"

"Big, heavy-set, long mustache, rather brutal."

The next recollection was painful: she remembered suddenly that her father, in her early childhood, wore a heavy mustache. "That never occurred to me."

In her extra-marital affairs, she identified herself with the girls of easy morals whom her mother had suspected of being "Father's companions."

"How did you react to the Peladan-game?"

"I was horrified and thought of suicide."

"You couldn't separate your two worlds in that game. Why did you consent in the first place?"

"The idea was abhorrent and attractive at the same time."

Months of working through the material was needed to resolve the unconscious conflicts of these two cultured persons who had many things in common. Neurotically, they both lived with the unconscious belief that sex was a degraded and degrading thing. In this, they were repeating the fantasies of their oedipal period. Mixed with this was a tendency to identify with the opposite sex. Their marriage was finally restored to normalcy.

An understanding that neurotic conflicts are involved in this "synchronization of neurotic patterns" is today an exception. In pre-psychiatric bliss and ignorance, neurotics go on repeating their patterns.

Examples of this could be multiplied *ad libitum*. They are all patterned on the basic fact that where logic ends, the unconscious begins.

The stability of every marriage can be judged by getting a truthful answer to the question: How frequently do you have a masochistic attack of injustice collecting? Unfortunately, the answer must be deduced from the neurotic's behavior; it cannot be achieved by direct interrogations. I have repeatedly observed truly pathologic people of this type who consciously were not at all aware of their sickness.

I have also analyzed a great many people who believed that they had found the remedy for marital ills: they lived together on the basis of "the new companionship." What this amounted to practically was either a trial period before marriage, or a marriage which dispensed with the usual obligations and added a few ideological trimmings. The theory behind this was that "marriage is out-of-date; our relationship is different." Behind this façade, both partners enjoyed "equal rights." Characteristic was the rejection of "sexual monopoly": both marriage partners "went their way"—if they felt like it. The result was a caricature of marriage, but the conflicts were identical with those in the usual bad marriage. What is more, a new conflict was added: the usual jealousy could not be openly expressed ("we modern people aren't jealous"), so the underlying anger was shifted to bagatelles. In the majority of these cases "injustice collecting" went on with a new slant. Quite typical seems to me the conflict of one of these men who, coming home from another girl, found his companionate-wife in bed with a member of his "new-horizon" circle. Being modern, he

could not object—sexual promiscuity was part of their pact—but inwardly he felt furious. The other man greeted him in a friendly manner, dressed, and put on one of the husband's neckties. That made the husband *officially* furious: a vicious quarrel started—over the symbolical necktie.

In cases in which the marriage license itself was proudly dispensed with, more often than not, social pressure continued, the woman being the victim. Some of these women, who felt that conventional marriage was mercenary, shifted the blame to the men, not seeing that their own neuroses prevented them from finding a suitable partner.

Promiscuity cloaked in pseudo-modernity spells old-fashioned neurosis. And neurosis, once established, is resistant to all ideological trimmings. So far, no substitute has been found for marriage. The reason is simple: a substitute does not exist. Every substitute is merely one of the many variations of neurosis.

All examples of the new variations of marriage show that actually no new form of marriage has been developed; the *old technique of injustice collecting* has simply been differently draped. The innovators were fooled by a rationalization.

A colleague of mine once remarked that one has to distinguish between two types of psychic situations: either "*the individual is sick*" or "*the situation is sick.*" Only in the latter case can advice based on common sense be effective.

For example: a patient of mine had lived for many years in constant conflict with her mother-in-law, who was really a possessive and nagging person. To complicate

matters, the young couple actually lived with the husband's mother. Officially, the scarcity of apartments was blamed for this circumstance, though my patient suspected that neither her mother-in-law nor her husband really wanted to "cut the umbilical cord," as she expressed it.

My patient consulted friends and acquaintances. There was complete unanimity: everyone advised her to look for a separate apartment. The reasoning was simple: eliminate the external disturbance. This advice was acted upon; the young couple found a one family house and moved into it. The conflicts, however, continued. The husband had only one yardstick: "What would mother say?" The young matron was furious every time her husband said this. She started a hopeless competition with her mother-in-law—hopeless because all three participants were living out neurotic conflicts.

Why was the so sensible advice, given by people with common sense, ineffective? One has to distinguish between *nuisance value* and *neurotic hitching-post* in a specific situation. Had the conflict of my patient been actually a reality-conflict, simple elimination of the disturbing factor would have helped. Where neurosis is involved, change of external factors is insufficient and ineffective.

## CHAPTER TWELVE

### The Future of Marriage

THE prediction of things to come is an accepted social game. It has gone so far that it is impossible to discuss a subject without being asked for one's opinion of the "shape of things to come."

The shape of things to come is—shapeless and unknown. The correct answer is: we don't know. Unable to accept this fact, people go all out for crystal-gazing. Objectively, the game is harmless enough: you cannot be proven wrong if you are cautious enough to limit your predictions to at least one hundred years hence.

Applied to marriages, prediction of the future is not rewarding. We cannot be sure of its final shape, nor of the possible intermediary stages either.

Nevertheless, because for various reasons the future of marriage seems optimistic to me, I shall venture to present my own ten-point *marital credo* for the future:

I believe that in the future, neurosis, the cancer of marriage, will be more frequently detected than today. I believe that psychiatric marriage clinics will treat neurotic marriage partners and in a good percentage of the cases repair the marriage.

Likewise, couples with neurotic tendencies who con-

template marriage will seek preventive treatment, provided that they are informed of the storm-signals indicating future trouble. Thus many hopeless entanglements will be prevented.

I believe that rebellion against marriage, though vociferous and verbose, is even today ineffectual. The great majority of men and women marry or remarry. Facts remain and fashion changes. Neurotics believe that they have to gripe about marriage. They are helped in this by fashion. It is quite possible that, since the facts of marriage are unchangeable, fashion will swing to the other extreme and marriage will become (at least intellectually) accepted for what it is in favorable circumstances: an indispensable institution for promoting happiness and contentment.

I believe that the basis of marriage is emotionally established at an early age—as I have said, in the nursery—and that therefore the institution of marriage is indestructible.

I believe that more widespread knowledge of child psychology will result in the understanding that a child is—at least—an “18-year plan.” Proper child-rearing presupposes the voluntarily accepted obligation of two people to make their marriage a stable one. This in turn means no divorce and no quarrels of major proportions between parents, both of which endanger the psychic health of the child.

I believe that the futility and ineffectiveness of divorce will be understood and that consequently couples will have their neuroticism psychiatrically treated instead of taking a trip to Reno. The formula “You can divorce

your husband (wife) but not your neurosis" will become a commonplace.\*

I believe that the fact that no substitute for marriage has ever been found is indicative of the stability of that institution. Marriage is here for good.

I believe that the poet Heine was mistaken in his assumption that no compass has been invented to steer one clear of the sea of marital troubles. As a matter of fact there is a tripartite compass for matrimony which has been used for thousands of years: *Loving kindness, compromise, and knowing one's place*. None of these requirements need be taught; the loving partner knows them instinctively. Proof positive is the fact that good marriages do exist in great numbers.

I believe that the future will witness the decline and fall of the he-man psychology. The results will be beneficial to marriage.

I believe that woman's resentment of man's prerogatives will gradually disappear—simply because these remnants of the patriarchal family will also disappear. Man and woman will meet on the basis of real and not pretended equality.

I believe, finally, that what human happiness mortals can achieve, they can achieve only in happy marriage. The slogan for the marriage of the future is perhaps Longfellow's prophetic stanza "Useless each without the other . . ."

\* Paradoxically, one could say that your divorce decree is merely a renewal of the marriage license to your neurosis.



